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ONE PRINCIPAL'S EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN A RURAL AND LOW-
PERFORMING MIDDLE SCHOOL IN VIRGINIA: A CASE STUDY

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University

by

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Dedication

To Luther

My husband, my partner, my friend—

Your love and support sustain me.

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ABSTRACT

ONE PRINCIPAL'S EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN A RURAL AND LOW-PERFORMING MIDDLE SCHOOL IN VIRGINIA: A CASE STUDY

Clara Lynn Fletcher Sodat, Ph.D.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Virginia Commonwealth University, 2010

Director: Dr. R. Martin Reardon
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This case study examined the leadership practices of one middle school principal in a low-performing rural school in Virginia. The experienced principal participant was in his first year of leadership at the school; he had led other low-performing schools to improved achievement that resulted in earning state accreditation as well as meeting federal Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) student proficiency targets. The focus school had failed to meet AYP for five consecutive years.

The qualitative research design for this study included in-depth, semi-structured interviews with teachers, the principal, the assistant principal, and the principal's supervisor; a total of 18 interviews were conducted. Throughout the course of the interviews, the principal's leadership was conceptualized using the framework of the six core components and six key process that form the basis for the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education ((VAL-ED) Murphy et al., 2007).

The findings that emerged concerning rural school challenges and organizational change affirmed well-supported assertions in the literature. Participants provided a well-conceptualized and expansively defined profile of the principal's strengths and areas for growth through the lens of the Murphy et al. (2007) framework for learning-centered leadership.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002) marked an unprecedented increase in accountability for the nation's schools, districts, and states. The Act requires each state to develop academic achievement standards in reading and mathematics, and to develop and administer standardized tests to measure student proficiency in these areas. By 2014, 100% of students are expected to demonstrate proficiency in reading and mathematics by passing states' approved assessments. All students, regardless of disability, language barriers, or other factors, must participate in their state's testing program.

In Virginia, the state's Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments in Grades 3 through 8 and certain required high school courses are used to measure achievement in compliance with NCLB. Required pass rates rise each year, moving towards the 100% proficiency requirement in 2014. In 2009, 79% of students were required to show proficiency in mathematics and 81% were required to show proficiency in reading for a school, a district, and for the state to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). In 2010, benchmarks rose marginally to 79.1% in mathematics and 81.1% in reading.

Meeting the achievement benchmarks established by NCLB legislation is far more challenging for some schools and districts than for others. Factors such as socioeconomic status, whether English is being spoken as a second language, learning or cognitive disability, and family background impact student achievement. Socio-economic status (SES) alone accounts for up to 30% of the variance in student achievement in national standardized testing (Lee & Wong, 2004). Typically, districts with more affluent

populations successfully meet AYP benchmarks even as they continue to rise (Carnevale, 2007). Schools with high poverty, often located in rural areas, struggle and in many cases fail to meet AYP benchmarks (Jimmerson, 2005).

In the United States, over 20% of counties are classified as rural (United States Department of Agriculture, 2007). In Virginia, 78 out of 133 localities, or 59%, are classified as rural (Virginia Department of Education, 2009d). Rural schools and school districts face challenges in leadership and learning (Horst & Martin, 2007). Cultural factors, community factors, and economic factors impact rural schools' human and material resources (Lamkin, 2006). Despite the large population of students enrolled in schools classified as rural, research on principal leadership in the context of rural school districts is limited (Parker-Rees & Willan, 2006).

Today's school principals are accountable for student performance on high-stakes assessments regardless of disparities in resources. To promote and positively influence student success, principals must understand the factors that influence success, and must reflect upon and work towards improving their practice. Principals must also possess an understanding of the context in which they work in order to meet the needs of the students and community to which they are accountable (Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003).

Statement of the Problem

The accountability movement has resulted in increased demands on principal leaders. School principals are expected to serve as the instructional leaders for their schools by devoting time and attention to teacher evaluation, curriculum and assessment

development, and student achievement data analysis. At the same time, principals continue to serve as managers of their schools. They create schedules, supervise custodial and cafeteria staff, and in many cases call substitutes and flag traffic. Despite increased responsibility for instruction and student achievement, principals continue to spend up to 60% of their time on managerial tasks (Catano & Stronge, 2006; Stronge, 1988).

Rural circumstances create challenges for rural school principals. Rural school districts often are not able to offer students the same resources offered in suburban, and sometimes urban, school districts. Although rural school communities are characterized by benefits such as smaller schools, close-knit communities, and strong relationships between students and teachers, rural schools, districts, and communities face a number of barriers to achieving academic success as measured by NCLB (Education Alliance, 2004; Horst & Martin, 2007). These barriers include lack of funding, difficulty in recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers, outdated facilities, limited technology, and a community culture that does not value higher education (Jimmerson, 2005; Jordan & Jordan, 2004). Lack of resources and limited advanced course offerings in rural school districts have been linked with academic performance deficits (Lee & McIntire, 2000).

High-stakes testing creates stress and frustration in schools that are struggling to meet achievement benchmarks. The level of concern is compounded in rural schools, where resources to improve student achievement are not readily available. Regardless of uncontrollable factors that negatively influence student achievement, accountability for student success as measured by standardized tests rests with the school principal.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership practices of a rural middle school principal of a school declared “in need of improvement” throughout the school year during which he prepared for and led his staff through the administration of the Virginia SOL assessments. The principal who was the focus of this case study had a track record of academic improvement and increased student achievement in schools that he had previously led. During the course of this study, the principal completed his first year as principal of a school that had not met federal AYP requirements for the past five years. Due to the lack of achievement at this school as measured by standardized tests, the school was designated as a school in School Improvement. Schools in School Improvement are required to develop detailed improvement plans that must be monitored at the district level.

The principal was employed in a school district that used the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-ED) (Murphy, Goldring, Cravens, Elliott, & Porter, 2007; Porter, Goldring, & Elliott, 2008) as the basis for a professional development program for principal leadership; VAL-ED was not used in the school district as an evaluation tool. VAL-ED is a leadership assessment tool that was developed by Vanderbilt University. VAL-ED is aligned with the national standards for educational leaders developed by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) (Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), 1996; ISLLC, 1996; CCSSO, 2008). VAL-ED was based upon a framework for learning-centered leadership that was designed to affect leadership change to bring about increased student outcomes (Murphy, Elliott, Goldring, & Porter, 2006; Murphy et al., 2007). The relationship between

principal leadership as conceptualized by the VAL-ED framework and the principal's role in working to improve student achievement in a low-performing school during his first year in the school were examined.

Rationale and Significance of the Study

This study was designed to contribute to the body of knowledge on principal leadership in three distinct areas: (a) research on rural school principal leadership, (b) research on principal leadership as it is measured by the VAL-ED evaluation tool and conceptualized within the learning-centered leadership framework, and (c) research on principal leadership in a low-performing school struggling to raise student achievement.

Studies point to the importance of understanding the influence of context in principal leadership. Though much time and attention has been devoted to the study of principal leadership in urban schools and districts, research on principal leadership for academic success in rural districts is not prevalent (Sherwood, 2001). The lack of emphasis placed upon rural school leadership created a gap in the knowledge base on educational leadership that was investigated in this study.

The theoretical framework used in this study to define the conditions for student success included the ISSLC-Standards-aligned VAL-ED instrument for measuring principal leadership, and the learning-centered leadership foundation upon which VAL-ED was based. An examination of how the rural school principal's leadership was viewed in relation to this foundation contributed to the body of knowledge on the implications of VAL-ED for school leaders.

In the nation's current accountability system, finding out what principals do to affect student achievement is of prime importance to educational leaders. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) argued that research was needed that explored how leaders responded flexibly to manage their schools and to create conditions for student success. This analysis of a single principal's leadership during the year-long preparation for and administration of the SOL assessments provided insight into participants' perceptions of principal leadership behaviors in the context of high-stakes testing in a low-performing school.

Literature/Research Background

Educational researchers have long sought to establish a correlation between effective principal leadership and student achievement. The assertion that principals impact student achievement is widely accepted; the influence of the principal on student achievement, though indirect, has been found to be second only to the influence of the teacher (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2004). A review of historical research on principal leadership indicated that beliefs and expectations about the role of the principal in America in the last several decades were reflective of the nation's political and social conditions at the time (Beck & Murphy, 1993). As the importance of student achievement moved to the forefront, the principal's role was redefined with an increasing focus on instructional leadership. However, despite principals' increasing accountability for student achievement, management responsibilities continued (Catano & Stronge, 2006).

Defining Principal Instructional Leadership

The construct of principal instructional leadership, though frequently studied by educational researchers in the past several decades, is not universally defined in the field. Some studies indicated that approachability, visibility, and focus on school improvement were indicators of effective principal leadership (Southworth, 2002; Witziers et al., 2003). Other studies found that key behaviors and actions influenced effective principal leadership (Nettles & Herrington, 2007; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Behaviors and actions were defined to include curriculum evaluation and monitoring, ensuring an orderly and supportive environment, maintaining high expectations, promoting stakeholder involvement, and establishing a school mission and vision. These varied descriptions of principal instructional leadership presented a challenge to educational researchers in their attempts to define and operationalize the construct.

Murphy et al. (2007) defined school level leadership as a process involving influence and purpose. They identified effective leadership behaviors based upon the leader's previous experiences, knowledge base, personal characteristics, and set of values and beliefs. Murphy et al. (2006) promoted a well-researched conceptual model of learning-centered leadership aligned with the ISLLC Standards for School Leaders (CCSSO, 1996). The conceptual model for learning-centered leadership adopted by Murphy et al. was organized into six core components and six key processes. The six core components, which represented characteristics indicative of effective instructional leadership, were: (a) high standards for student learning, (b) rigorous curriculum, (c) quality instruction, (d) culture of learning and professional behavior, (e) connections to external communities, and (f) performance accountability. Key processes, which were

conceptualized as leadership behaviors that contributed to the core components, were: (a) planning, (b) implementing, (c) supporting, (d) advocating, (e) communicating, and (f) monitoring. The learning-centered leadership foundation formed the basis for the VAL-ED principal evaluation tool.

Evaluating Principal Instructional Leadership

Although the national ISSLC standards were developed over a decade ago, a nationally endorsed measurement tool aligned with these standards that analyzes school leaders' effectiveness has not been universally adopted (Goldring et al., 2008; Thomas, Holdaway, & Ward, 2000). The recently developed and validated VAL-ED survey, based upon the Murphy et al. model for learning-centered leadership, appears to be the most sophisticated assessment of school level leadership currently available (Wallace Foundation, 2009). VAL-ED is an evidence-based measurement tool that can be used by principals to evaluate their own practice, and can also be used by teachers and supervisors to evaluate principal performance. The 72 performance indicators on the survey are based upon research on effective principal leadership and are aligned with the ISSLC standards. VAL-ED has the potential to be used in conjunction with targeted principal professional development. Results from VAL-ED provide feedback on the core components and key processes to assist principals and school district leaders in targeting areas of strength and weakness, and in developing comprehensive professional development for school level leaders.

Principal Leadership in Rural Schools

Existing research on rural schools and districts indicates that a number of contextual factors prevalent in rural school districts affect school and student success. Rural schools have been characterized as operating in a context that is both facilitative and restraining (Education Alliance, 2004). Though benefits to rural school systems such as well-formed relationships among students, staffs, and parents are espoused in the literature, there are limitations associated with rural schooling (Horst & Martin, 2007). Challenges that impact rural principal leadership and learning can be grouped into three major areas: (a) cultural factors, (b) community factors, and (c) economic factors.

Cultural factors. Rural districts are often considered to be close-knit and people-centered. Egley and Jones (2004) explained that in rural communities, direct, verbal relationships among citizens were highly valued. This focus on face-to-face relationships resulted in an undervaluing of the computer and Internet technology that guides much educational innovation today. Principals' pleas to improve technology in rural schools and districts were likely to be misunderstood and, therefore, unfunded, due to this aspect of rural culture.

Migrant, immigrant, and non-native English speaking residents are increasingly present in rural communities (Rural School and Community Trust, 2009). Understanding and integrating diverse cultures into rural schools presents a challenge for educators and school leaders. In addition, meeting the needs of diverse student populations requires financial resources that were not required decades ago, when many rural populations were more homogenous. Rural schools often struggle to eliminate achievement gaps among diverse populations (Williams, 2003).

Community factors. Blanton and Harmon (2005) found that rural community leaders were hesitant to promote high levels of academic achievement and advanced skill sets for their highest achieving students; rural students with high achievement and advanced academic skills were more likely to leave the community. This exodus was evidenced by a decrease in the sons and daughters of farming families entering the agricultural field, and an increase in migrant and immigrant populations being employed in agriculture. Egley and Jones (2004) sympathized with the students' viewpoint on this issue, and explained that rural students were often reluctant to pursue higher education opportunities that would cause them to leave the communities with which they identified so strongly, regardless of the students' academic abilities to succeed. Without community support for career advancement and upward mobility, rural principals face challenges to implementing high standards for student achievement.

Economic factors. The financial picture in rural communities is often bleak (Diaz, 2008; Education Alliance, 2004; Horst & Martin, 2007). Diaz cited a number of financial issues that rural school districts struggle with, including: (a) flaws in state funding formulas for per-pupil allocation that negatively impact rural districts due to smaller economies of scale; (b) the excessive costs of providing student transportation in sparsely populated, land-expansive districts; and (c) limited tax bases to provide local funding for schools. The depth of poverty in some rural communities should not be underestimated; in certain rural areas of the country the poverty rate for school-aged children is over twice the national average (Bouck, 2004; Nadel & Sagawa, 2002). In

Virginia, poverty issues in rural communities are significant (Rural School and Community Trust, 2009).

Jordan and Jordan (2004) and Jimmerson (2005) found that limited funding in rural districts resulted in low teacher salaries and poor quality educational facilities. Cullen, Brush, Frey, Hinshaw, and Warren (2006) expressed concerns that funding challenges in rural districts resulted in school districts' inability to comply with NCLB. Boyle (2002) found that the cost of providing resources to special student populations overwhelmed rural school districts. Declining community populations resulted in declining enrollment, and sometimes school closure, for many rural schools (Harmon, Gordanier, Henry, & George, 2007; Sullivan, 2000).

Principal Leadership in Low-Performing Schools

High-stakes testing changed the educational landscape in our nation's schools (Hursh, 2005). The responsibilities and priorities of principals shifted dramatically in reaction to federal and state requirements (Reitzug, West, & Angel, 2008; Supon, 2008). In response to external pressure, turnaround programs were developed to initiate school reform in the nation's lowest-performing schools (Calkins, Guenther, Belfoire, & Lash, 2007). In Virginia, the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program (VSTSP) provided principals in struggling school districts with a two year training opportunity to reform low-performing schools (University of Virginia Darden School of Business, 2009). The VSTSP combined instructional leadership with a business model for organizational change. Other states in the nation adopted or adapted the VSTSP to

provide assistance to principals and districts that struggled to meet the achievement requirements of NCLB.

Research Questions

This study investigated how a principal in a low-performing rural middle school in Virginia operated in relation to the VAL-ED theoretical framework of learning-centered leadership. Specifically, principal leadership characteristics were studied as the principal prepared for and led his school through the high-stakes SOL testing administration. Foreshadowed questions for this qualitative research were:

1. How was the principal viewed as a learning-centered leader in relation to the VAL-ED framework?
2. What were the perceived barriers in terms of learning-centered leadership to the school's academic success?
3. What were the principal's leadership behaviors and priorities in preparation for SOL testing?
4. What were the principal's leadership behaviors and priorities during SOL testing?

Methodology

The research questions in this study led to a qualitative design. Specifically, this case study examined the leadership of one middle school principal in the rural school context. The case study tradition of qualitative inquiry was appropriate because the study sought to develop an in-depth understanding and analysis of a single case or bounded system (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1988). Maxwell (2005, p. 22-23) linked qualitative research with five intellectual goals:

- understanding the meaning of events, experiences, situations, and actions;
- understanding the context within which participants act, and the influence that context has on their actions;
- identifying unanticipated influences, and generating grounded theories about them;
- understanding the process by which events and actions take place; and
- describing causal explanations.

According to Merriam (1988), qualitative case study research designs are preferred to understand and interpret educational phenomena. Case study research is prevalent in studies of rural school leadership (Anderson, 2008; Hall, 2009; Horst & Martin, 2007; Jenkins, 2007; Sanderlin, 2008; Schofield, 2008; Watts, 2009). The qualitative case study is described as particularistic, descriptive, heuristic, and inductive (Merriam, 1988).

Multiple methods of data collection can and should be used in case study research (Creswell, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Data sources may include information collected through interviews, observations, document review and analysis, and audio-visual materials (Creswell, 1998). The case study design is strengthened by incorporating multiple types of evidence, which lead the researcher to enhance generalizability through triangulation of data (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Merriam, 1988).

The fieldwork for this study included in-depth, semi-structured participant interviews. In order to gain multiple perspectives on the principal's leadership, several participants were selected in accordance with established criterion (Creswell, 1998).

Participants included the principal, the assistant principal, six teachers, and the principal's supervisor. Interviews were conducted prior to and following the administration of the SOL assessments; 18 interviews were conducted. The length of each interview was between 15 and 60 minutes. Each interview was analyzed to determine emerging themes. Constant comparison (Creswell, 1998) was used throughout the process of interviewing, coding, and interpreting.

In addition to interviews, data collection included an analysis of school documents and artifacts, observation, a researcher journal, and a researcher log. The school's academic improvement plan, documents from staff and leadership team minutes, and school newsletters were examined. Pre-existing documentation on the principal's fall of 2009 self-evaluation using VAL-ED survey was analyzed, as well as data from the spring of 2010 administration of VAL-ED, which was completed during the course of this research. Data analysis included coding and categorizing evidence using the ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software program.

The analyses and assertions made as a result of this study offer the reader the opportunity to gain an in-depth view of the particular situation that is the focus of this study. At the same time, this situation is replicated in many similarly situated schools and districts across the Commonwealth of Virginia and across the nation.

Definition of Terms

Accountability

Responsibility; most commonly refers to responsibility for student achievement as measured by standardized assessments.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

This refers to standardized testing benchmarks that must be met for a school or district in a state to meet achievement expectations required by the No Child Left Behind legislation.

Instructional Leadership

Leadership provided by a school principal that is chiefly concerned with student outcomes.

Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards

Standards for school leaders developed by a cadre of educational leaders representing all states in the nation. These standards were first developed in 1996, and subsequently revised in 2008.

Leadership

The process of influencing others to achieve mutually agreed upon purposes for the organization (Murphy et al., 2007, p. 2).

Learning-Centered Leadership

Conceptual model for principal leadership developed by Murphy et al. (2006, 2007). This model is aligned with the ISLLC Standards, and focuses on identifying leadership behaviors that influence student success.

Management

Principal responsibilities that are not directly related to student achievement. These may include discipline, bus duty, custodial management, cafeteria management, and budget management.

Middle School

A school which houses students in grades six through eight. For the purposes of comparative analysis of SOL data within the state of Virginia, all schools that house grades six, seven, and/or eight are included.

Principal

The administrative and instructional leader of a school.

Rural School District

A school district that has been classified by the Virginia Department of Education as rural (Virginia Department of Education, 2009d).

Turnaround

“A documented, quick, dramatic, and sustained change in the performance of an organization” (Kowal, Hassel, Hassel, & Rhim, 2007, p. 3).

Turnaround Specialist

A principal who has completed and been certified through a turnaround specialist program such as the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program (VSTSP).

Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-ED)

This 72-item survey is aligned with the ISLLC Standards and is theoretically based upon the Murphy et al. (2006, 2007) concept of learning-centered leadership. It is intended for use by principals, teachers, and principal supervisors. The survey measures principal leadership based upon six core processes and six key components.

Summary

No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002) mandates that all students meet state-established proficiency levels on annual assessments, regardless of factors such as socioeconomic status, learning disability, or language barrier. NCLB requirements present challenges for educational leaders. The need for research investigating how rural school leaders overcome the challenges presented by NCLB was identified (Bouck, 2004). The challenges faced by principals in rural schools striving to meet NCLB achievement mandates required further examination.

The VAL-ED leadership assessment (Murphy et al., 2007; Porter et al., 2008) represents the most current and comprehensive measure of effective leadership behaviors and processes. This assessment is intended to be used as part of a comprehensive professional development plan for school leaders. An examination of principal leadership during the preparation for and administration of SOL assessments in Virginia using the theoretical framework of VAL-ED was completed to provide insight into the leadership activities that come into play during this crucial time in the school year.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Educators have long studied a multitude of facets of principal leadership. For the purpose of this study, research on a number of subject-relevant aspects of principal leadership was reviewed. A review of the historic role of the principal indicated that expectations for principal leadership have changed over time. An exploration of the current role and potential future role of the principal showed that the principalship continues to evolve. Research on factors that influence the principalship revealed that No Child Left Behind (2002) has hugely influenced the role. Additional factors explored that were specific to this research included rural school factors, research on leadership to affect change, and research on turnaround programs including the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program (VSTSP) (University of Virginia Darden School of Business, 2009, 2010). Theoretical frameworks studied that conceptualized principal leadership included the ISLLC Standards for educational leaders (ISLLC, 1996), the VAL-ED survey tool (Murphy et al., 2007), and the Murphy et al. (2006, 2007) model of learning-centered leadership.

The research compiled for this literature review included articles and books collected over three years of study on educational leadership. To deepen the scope of the study, a search was initiated using the Virginia Commonwealth University library website. Academic Search Complete was selected as the search engine for periodicals/journals. Once Academic Search Complete was accessed, additional search engines were selected (ERIC, Education Research Complete, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, and Women's Studies

International). The option to display only articles from scholarly, refereed journals was chosen. The two keyword searches that yielded the best results were: (a) “principal” and “rural school”, and (b) “principal leadership” and “case study.” Websites that contributed to the research included the Virginia Department of Education website, the University of Virginia Darden School of Business website, and the Wallace Foundation website. Additional resources were identified by reviewing the reference pages in relevant articles, and then accessing the primary sources referred to in those articles.

To select primary sources for inclusion in the literature review, the researcher used the guidelines suggested by McMillan and Schumacher (2006). These included a focus on credibility, journal reputation, and relevance. In particular, the researcher sought articles that presented a theoretical framework for the study of principal leadership. Both quantitative and qualitative studies were sought, as well as literature that presented an historical perspective on the topic.

Principal Leadership

Historic Role of the Principal

Early Americans were educated in one-room schoolhouses by teachers who performed all operational and managerial roles themselves (Beck & Murphy, 1993; Tyack, 1974). As student populations and schools grew, the need for leaders of teachers emerged. The first “teacher principals” served the dual role of teacher and school leader. Beck and Murphy (1993) found that this practice continued into the early 20th century, when the significance of the principalship was recognized by the formation of two

departments in the National Education Association: the Department of Elementary School Principals and the Department of Secondary School Principals.

In a study of the evolution of the principalship from the 1920s to the 1990s, Beck and Murphy (1993) described metaphorical themes for each decade that exemplified the principal's role in the changing historical, educational, and societal landscape. They analyzed historical educational and non-educational literature and determined the themes, tones, values, and conceptions of the principal's relationship to others in the community, as well as standards of principal evaluation for each decade using a framework based upon the following elements: (a) dominant metaphorical themes; (b) dominant tone(s) of the metaphors; (c) values that dominated each decade; (d) conceptions of the principal's relationships to community, school boards, teachers, and students; and (e) standards against which the work of the principal was evaluated (Beck & Murphy, 1993, p. 5) . Beck and Murphy found that the role of the principal was reflective of the political, economic, and social non-educational national and international conditions throughout the decades they studied. A summary of Beck and Murphy's analyses of the evolving role of the principalship follows.

The 1920s: Value broker. The role of the principal in the 1920s was concerned with promoting spiritual values and enthusiasm for education. Principals played the dual role of teacher and disciplinarian, and also served as team members with superintendents as well as guides to other teachers. Principals were viewed as social leaders, and were considered successful if they promoted spiritual truths and scientific management. The

dominant tone was one of optimism, and principals were regarded highly in the community.

The 1930s: Scientific manager. The 1930s were characterized by a continued emphasis on the principles of scientific management. Spiritual matters took a back seat to the business side of education. Principals concerned themselves more with organizing and supervising than with teaching. Hierarchies within schools and districts were developed. Schools were increasingly characterized by prevailing business models of successful management, and efficiency was highly valued. Principals were considered successful if they led organized and efficient schoolhouses.

The 1940s: Democratic leader. World War II-era principals were tasked with providing democratic school leadership. Peace, productivity and solving social issues were stressed during this time period. The hierarchical bent of the 1930s was tempered in the 1940s by a push towards equality and shared leadership. Principals were viewed as facilitators and curriculum guides, setting the American Tone (Beck & Murphy, 1993, p. 39). Principals were considered effective if they used scarce resources wisely and promoted democracy in schools.

The 1950s: Theory-guided administrator. In the 1950s, the role of the principal showed great growth and transition. For the first time, principals were labeled as administrators. They were expected to apply theories established in the growing body of educational research. As university-based administrative training programs developed, principals were expected to exhibit skills related to the scientific study of education, while at the same time effectively managing detailed administrative tasks. Efficient time

management was again stressed. Growing and competing expectations for principal leadership in the 1950s led Beck and Murphy (1993) to describe the dominant tones of this decade as objective, academic, detailed and specific.

The 1960s: Bureaucratic executive. During the great social change and upheaval of the 1960s, principals were concerned with maintaining order, stability, and normalcy. Principal accountability for student achievement emerged. Principals were expected to operate with technical efficiency—dominant descriptors included standardization and uniformity. Principals were viewed as mid-level bureaucrats, tasked with carrying out the objectives of supervisors. By the 1960s, the tone of administration had moved from idealistic to rational and concrete.

The 1970s: Humanistic facilitator. In the 1970s, principals were concerned with relationships. Bureaucracy and standardization took a back seat to meaning-making, social relevancy, humanism and relationship-building with the community. Principals were tasked with relating to teachers as partners while at the same time pushing schools towards innovative and child-centered instruction. The well-being of the student population and of the community was a chief concern of the principal.

The 1980s: Instructional leader. The 1980s principal was expected to fulfill the roles of instructional leader, problem-solver, visionary and change agent. Increased accountability from the federal government, as well as a number of corresponding reports that declared American schools lacking, struggling, and at risk, resulted in increased pressure and responsibility for school principals. America's economic struggles were blamed at least in part on deficiencies in America's public schools. Beck and Murphy

(1993) described the call for principals to impact and improve the quality of education as urgent and demanding. School failures were viewed as principal failures, and principals were evaluated by their ability to affect school change and increase student performance. The child-centered schoolhouse ceded to a standards-based, mathematics-and-science-rich institution.

The 1990s: Education for all. Beck and Murphy (1993) described the role of the 1990s principal as one challenged with the post-industrial goal of educating all students well. The roles that Beck and Murphy identified for the principal included principal as leader, principal as servant, principal as organizational architect, principal as social architect, principal as educator, principal as moral agent, and principal as person in the community. In the Information Age, Beck and Murphy imagined school reform and restructuring that would move schools from institutions to communities, principals from managers to leaders, and teachers from workers to leaders.

Current Roles of the Principalship: Instructional Leader and Plant Manager

Increased accountability for student success, as measured by standards-based assessments, has led to a complex and multi-faceted description of contemporary principal leadership. Catano and Stronge (2006) identified skills and responsibilities that included strategic planning, human relations skills, staff development, financial management, long-range planning, media relations, and day-to-day operations. Catano and Stronge also identified newly required skills for effective principals that included knowledge of bilingual education and an understanding of cultural diversity. The role of

instructional leader has emerged as being of key importance to today's principals (Catano & Stronge, 2006; Fullan, 2006).

Lashway's examination of the construct of instructional leadership revealed that it was not clearly defined (2002, 2003a, 2003b). Lashway found that the instructional leader was described as democratic, community-minded, and committed to accountability. Common elements describing the role of principal as instructional leader included the need for the principal to: (a) use data to make decisions, (b) maintain engagement with classroom instruction, (c) create learning communities, and (d) focus on professional development. Principals, Lashway (2002) proposed, faced four common challenges: (a) providing focused instructional leadership, (b) leading change, (c) developing a collaborative leadership structure, and (d) providing the moral center. Responding to these challenges effectively required harnessing the leadership power of teachers and other school staff. Lashway suggested that "sub-principals" were needed to adequately manage the diverse responsibilities of principal leaders (Lashway, 2003b).

In a study of school leaders that successfully transformed their schools into high-performing organizations, Burrello, Hoffman, and Murray (2005) found that successful leaders displayed clarity of vision, purpose, and principles. Effective principals prioritized tasks in accordance with the established vision, emphasized professional development to increase capacity, and fostered democratic communities within their schools. The successful principals that Burrello et al. studied organized their faculties for systemic change instead of operating in isolation. Similarly, Hess and Robinson (2006) advocated for systemic change in schools and districts. They argued that school leaders

needed to move beyond short-term solutions to affect long term change. Focus areas included vision, priorities, capacity-building, relationships and teamwork, and shared leadership.

Sergiovanni (1999, 2007) proposed that there were five forces of leadership that contributed to excellence in schooling. These forces were viewed as a hierarchy (see Figure 1). Within this hierarchy, Sergiovanni explained that the role of the principal was to balance managerial and moral imperatives to build character and capacity within schools. Sergiovanni found that leadership theory often neglected some aspects of leadership which were critical to promoting excellence in schools. He viewed accomplished technical, human, and educational leadership as critical to competent schooling. To reach the highest levels of the hierarchy—and organizational excellence in schools—Sergiovanni argued that principals must have expertise as symbolic and cultural leaders. Sergiovanni also found that when educational leaders exhibited skills at the highest levels of leadership, their skill level at the lower levels were deemphasized in their leadership.

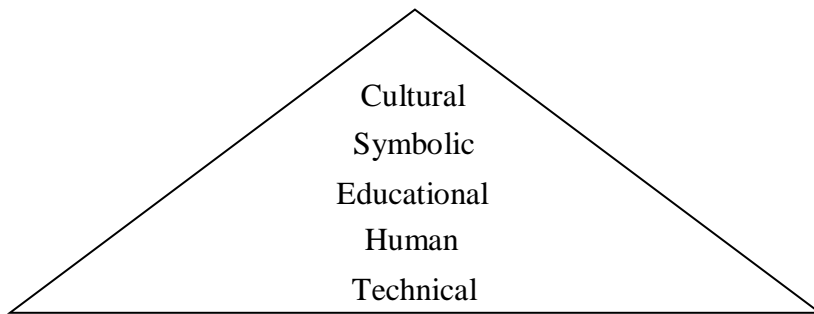


Figure 1. Sergioiovanni's Forces of Leadership. The five forces are conceptualized as a hierarchy. Principals must have some level of expertise in all areas of the hierarchy to lead competently. Symbolic and cultural expertise is necessary for excellence in schools. Adapted from "Rethinking Leadership" by T. J. Sergioiovanni. Copyright 2007 by Corwin Press.

McEwan (2003) applied Sergioiovanni's (1999) hierarchy to the construct of instructional leadership (Table 1).

Table 1

Synthesis of Sergiovanni's Forces of Leadership and McEwan's Construct of Instructional Leadership

Type of Organization	Sergiovanni's Forces of Leadership	McEwan's Analysis of Sergiovanni's Forces	McEwan's Seven Steps Characterizing Instructional Leadership
School Specific: Instructional Leadership	Cultural	Articulating school's values and beliefs	Creating a school culture and climate conducive to learning; developing teacher leaders
	Symbolic	Representing school and its purpose	Communicating the school's mission and vision
	Educational	Teaching and learning, curriculum	Establishing academic standards; serving as an instructional resource
Generic to Any Organization	Human	Communicating, motivating, facilitating	Setting high expectations for staff and self; developing positive relationships
	Technical	Managing, organizing	

McEwan (2003, p. 5-6, 15) argued that the educational, symbolic, and cultural leadership forces to which Sergiovanni referred comprised instructional leadership; seven steps or tasks that characterized effective instructional leadership were defined. These seven elements defined the principal as an instructional leader who:

- Established, implemented, and achieved academic standards,
- Acted as an instructional resource,
- Created a school culture and climate conducive to learning,
- Communicated the school's mission and vision,

- Set high expectations for staff and self,
- Developed teacher leaders, and
- Developed and maintained positive relationships with students, staff, and parents.

Like Sergiovanni, McEwan stressed the importance of cultural competence in building academic capacity in schools.

Future Role of the Principalship

Fullan (2006) proposed that sustainability was a key aspect of future planning for principals. This required a new kind of leadership, which Fullan termed *system thinkers in action*. Fullan defined eight elements of sustainability upon which systems thinkers in action focused: (a) public service with a moral purpose; (b) commitment to changing context at all levels; (c) lateral capacity-building through networks; (d) co-dependent, vertical relationships for capacity-building and accountability; (e) deep learning; (f) commitment to short- and long-term results; (g) cyclical energizing; and (h) long-levered leadership (2006, p. 115). Several of the eight elements referred specifically to the importance of establishing relationships both within and between schools as a necessary factor to sustain improvement. To describe public service with a moral purpose, Fullan explained that all core activities must be geared towards closing the achievement gap, fostering respect among students, staff, and the community, and improving the environment across schools and districts. By changing context at all levels, Fullan referred to the contexts of school/community, district, and system; the challenge he identified with this element was in determining strategies to change contexts outside of

the school setting. Lateral capacity-building and co-dependent relationships referred to relationship-building both within and outside an individual school's realm. Fullan argued that self-evaluation, the development of collaborative cultures of inquiry and group cohesion, and change across school levels (school, district, and community) were necessary to affect sustainable reform. Sustainable reform implied that the principal must expand his or her sphere of influence outside of the schoolhouse to influence broader systems.

The role of the principal continues to evolve. Today's principal is accountable for legacy responsibilities including time management, democratic leadership, and relationship-building, as well as instructional leadership, school culture and student achievement. As the principalship continues to evolve, it is believed that the principal will act as the primary reform agent within the organization, serving as both the practical manager and the visionary in the schoolhouse. It will be important for the principal to foster relationships within the school house, in the community, and in other districts to influence change and sustain success.

Factors that Influence Principal Leadership

No Child Left Behind: A Technical Summary

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002) legislated, but left essentially unfunded, unprecedented mandates for school, district, and state accountability to federal government regulations. All schools, districts, and states receiving funds through federal grant programs are required to adhere to the achievement benchmarks, and in some cases adhere to the punitive sanctions, outlined in NCLB. The

public policy reach of federal funding is extensive. Public school districts are eligible for federal funds for programs such as:

- Title I (formerly Chapter 1), which provides funds intended to supplement remediation services for at-risk students,
- Title II-A (formerly known as the Eisenhower Grant), which provides funds for class-size reduction and staff professional development,
- Title II-D (also known as the EdTech grant), which provides funds for technology training and materials with a focus on integrating technology into instruction,
- Title III, which provides funds to enhance the learning opportunities of English Language Learners,
- Title IV (also known as the Carl Perkins Grant), which provides funds to enhance Career and Technical Education programs, and
- Title VI-B, which provides funds for Special Education programs.

Even small public school districts are likely to receive hundreds of thousands of dollars through the federal grants listed above. Though the challenging nature of NCLB requirements has resulted in schools' and school districts' failure to meet AYP, at this point in Virginia there are no known districts that have rejected federal funding in order to avoid AYP requirements. This is the case even though the local cost of implementing NCLB in Virginia is estimated at between \$204 and \$219 per child annually, which equates to between \$238 million and \$267 million across the Commonwealth (Lu, 2005).

Lu reported that in 2004-2005, the administrative costs of NCLB alone were federally underfunded by \$62 million.

NCLB (2002) required all states to develop standardized assessments to be administered in Grades 3 through 8 and in designated high school courses in reading and mathematics. In addition, NCLB required that science be assessed at least once in elementary school, once in middle school and once in high school. In Virginia, the state Standards of Learning (SOL) curriculum and assessment program was adjusted to include the NCLB-required mathematics, reading and science assessments, as well as an additional elementary level science assessment, history/social studies assessments, and writing assessments in Grades 5, 8, and once at the high school level.

Under NCLB (2002) all states were required to establish set benchmark pass rates in reading and mathematics to determine student proficiency. Schools, districts, and the state as a whole are considered to have achieved Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) if they meet these federally-approved benchmarks. Virginia set initial pass rates in 2002, which were revised in 2005 and subsequently in 2010. Virginia's established AYP benchmarks are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

Revised NCLB AYP Targets in Virginia

Year	Mathematics (% Proficiency)			Reading (% Proficiency)		
	2002	Revised 2005	Revised 2010	2002	Revised 2005	Revised 2010
2001-02	60.7			58.4		
2002-03	61			59		
2003-04	61			59		
2004-05	70	65		70	63	
2005-06	70	69		70	67	
2006-07	70	73		70	71	
2007-08	80	77		80	75	
2008-09	80	81		80	79	
2009-10	80	85	>81	80	83	>79
2010-11	90	89	TBD	90	87	TBD
2011-12	90	93	TBD	90	91	TBD
2012-13	90	97	TBD	90	95	TBD
2013-14	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note. Adapted from “Amendments Approved by USED to Virginia’s NCLB Accountability Workbook, July 29, 2010” by Virginia Department of Education, 2010a.

In order to make AYP, pass rates must be met for all students and also for six additional subgroups by which achievement data are disaggregated. In Virginia, the subgroups are: white students, black students, Hispanic students, Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, disabled students, and economically disadvantaged students (Virginia Department of Education, 2009a). At least 95% of students enrolled in each subgroup must participate in the SOL assessments, regardless of performance, or the school or district is unable to make AYP.

An additional provision, *safe harbor*, was approved by the United States Department of Education as an alternative way for schools or districts to make AYP. This option is applied to schools and districts that fail to meet the established benchmarks for all students or for one or more subgroups. To qualify for the safe harbor provision in Virginia: (a) 95% of students in all subgroups must participate in the SOL assessments, (b) the percentage of students failing to pass an assessment in a particular subgroup or subgroups must be reduced by 10%, and (c) students in the failing subgroup must achieve the expected benchmark in the Other Academic Indicator (OAI) identified by the school or district (Virginia Department of Education, 2003). The OAI may be an SOL-assessed academic subject not included in NCLB (English writing, science, or social studies). The pass rate for OAI subjects corresponds to the requirements for Virginia state accreditation, which is currently 70%. As an alternative to selecting an achievement measure, the district may select to be accountable for maintaining a 94% attendance rate to fulfill the requirement of the OAI. For all schools with a graduating class, the OAI defaults to graduation rate. In 2010, the required graduation rate to make AYP under safe harbor was 80%.

Even with safe harbor, some schools and school districts struggle to make AYP. As benchmarks continue to rise, fewer schools and districts have been able to meet achievement requirements. In 2010, 60% of Virginia schools met AYP requirements. Statewide, students continued to perform lower than expected on sixth and seventh grade mathematics assessments, with a state pass rate for all students of 77% in Grade 6 and 75% in Grade 7 (Virginia Department of Education, 2010b). One hundred and twenty

school districts, or 91% of school districts, did not make AYP; only 12 school districts made AYP. In 2009, 71% or 525 schools made AYP and 60 school districts made AYP (Virginia Department of Education, 2009e).

Rural School Factors

An estimated 19% of the nation's total public school enrollment, or over 9 million students, attend rural schools (Rural School and Community Trust, 2009). Over 50% of all rural school students attend school in 11 states: North Carolina, Texas, Ohio, Georgia, Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York, Tennessee, Michigan, California, and Alabama. Of these 11 states, Virginia has the 5th largest rural student population (Rural School and Community Trust, 2009). Despite the large scope and the unique context of rural schools, studies on rural school leadership are limited (Salazar, 2007).

Rural schools are situated in communities with unique benefits and unique challenges (Huysman, 2008; Pitzel et al., 2007). In a mixed methods study examining rural teachers' job satisfaction, Huysman found that rural teachers enjoyed security, activity, social service, variety, and ability utilization. Anderson (2008) suggested that the lack of formalized leadership positions in many rural schools led to increased teacher leadership, and resulted in teachers assuming roles as transformational leaders. In a qualitative case study examining the relationship between a rural school community and its superintendent, Jenkins (2007) found that the smallness of the rural community led to increased visibility and influence for the superintendent. The superintendent was viewed as a key leader in the community, as well as a role model. He was able to influence decision-making due to his public role.

In Virginia, 59% of school districts are classified as rural (Virginia Department of Education, 2009d). In *Why Rural Matters*, a report authored by The Rural School and Community Trust (2009), data from the National Center for Education Statistics, the U.S. Census Bureau, and the New American Foundation was compiled to analyze, describe and compare rural school conditions across the 50 states. The five areas or gauges used to measure rural conditions were: importance, student and family diversity, educational policy context, educational outcomes and concentrated poverty. Rankings were developed for each gauge to describe the degree to which the rural conditions in each states were indicative of poor conditions and prospects for residents. Virginia was ranked in the top or second quartile in the areas of importance, educational policy context, educational outcomes, and concentrated poverty. The authors surmised that there was a need for Virginia's policy makers to address equity among diverse rural populations to support student achievement.

In a case study investigating the relationship between rural principal and superintendent leadership and the academic performance of children of poverty, Horst and Martin (2007, p. 33-34) summarized numerous challenges that rural school leaders faced. These challenges included:

- Insufficient school funding due to limited local tax bases and sparse populations,
- Increased poverty among rural families,
- Increased migrant, immigrant, and non-native English speaking populations,
- Difficulty hiring and retaining certified, highly qualified teachers,

- Lower salaries than competing suburban and urban school districts,
- Lack of community support for improving education due to the fear that students will pursue higher education and subsequently leave the community, and
- Increased funding challenges to provide services to students with special needs.

Horst and Martin suggested that training designed to identify and foster leadership characteristics that positively impact student achievement could help school leaders overcome the barriers prevalent in rural schools and communities.

Leadership for School Change and Reform

The accountability standards imposed by NCLB (NCLB, 2002) prompted an increased focus on change and reform in education. Research on school change asserts the importance of effective school-level leadership in affecting change that is significant and sustainable (Fennel, 2005; Fullan, 2001, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2009). An understanding of factors and processes involved in affecting and sustaining change in learning organizations is critical to the success of educational reform initiatives (Fullan, 2008; Fullan, Hill, & Crevola, 2006; Senge, 2006).

Leadership Characteristics to Initiate and Influence Change

The literature on educational change indicates that effective leaders for change possess and cultivate: (a) a strong knowledge of teaching and learning, and (b) the ability to use their social and emotional expertise to positively influence their faculties, students, parents, and communities.

Newmann, King, and Youngs (2000) found that effective change leaders cultivated five elements to develop school capacity for change: (a) teachers' knowledge, skills and disposition; (b) professional community; (c) program coherence; (d) technical resources, and (e) principal leadership. Goleman (1998) examined necessary elements of principal leadership to affect change, and argued that emotional competence, which was comprised of personal and social competence, was paramount. Personal competence referred to self-awareness and self-regulation; social competence incorporated motivation, empathy and social skills. Fullan (2006) supported this claim, arguing that change leaders must connect with people's emotions and feelings in a meaningful way to be successful.

Effective school leaders who influence change must develop a sense of community in their schools. Fennel (2005) found that collaboratively working with teachers to establish and maintain a professional community within the school, valuing people and their contributions, establishing open communication, developing a common vision, expressing both concern and encouragement, and establishing and modeling trust were all required to effectively influence change. Mulford (2006) supported these findings; he asserted that developing the social community, professional community, and capacity within an organization were necessary to promote change. The development of the social community included communicating trust, respect, and encouragement.

Sustainable Change

Educational change and reform initiatives, though they may be successful in the short-term, often fail in the long term as teachers revert to previously unsuccessful but

automatized practices (Fullan, 2008, 2010; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2009). To sustain change, Hargreaves and Fullan (2009) argued that leaders must focus on establishing the gap between the status quo and student success. Unless educators accepted, understood and supported the need to change, initiatives failed to gain long-term leverage. Successful and sustainable change initiatives were also found to be dependent upon selecting the correct elements upon which to focus—changing too much at once resulted in overwhelming frustration and ultimately in failure (Fullan 2005, 2010).

Fullan (2005) developed eight core elements of sustainability; Hargreaves and Fink (2006) established seven principles of sustainability. Common to these constructs were: (a) depth of learning, (b) developing and distributing leadership capacity, and (c) moral accountability and social justice. Depth of learning referred to the commitment of all stakeholders to continuously learn and improve. Developing and distributing leadership capacity indicated that change initiatives could not hinge on one leader—teacher leaders had to be empowered and provided with prerequisite knowledge to promote change. Finally, moral accountability and social justice referred to the moral imperative to educate all children fairly, equitably and to the highest possible level.

Turnaround Leadership for School Reform

Kowal et al. defined *turnaround* as “a documented, quick, dramatic, and sustained change in the performance of an organization” (2007, p. 3). Calkins et al. (2007) distinguished between turnaround approach for school reform versus leadership for school improvement. They asserted that turnaround programs and principles were intended for the lowest performing 5% of schools—those that were faced with

restructuring and in danger of closing due to chronic underperformance. The majority of these schools operated in high-poverty areas. Factors that contributed to the achievement gap in high-poverty, underperforming schools included: (a) chronic absenteeism, (b) student behavior issues, (c) high levels of student transience, (d) teacher turnover, (e) limited parent involvement, and (f) low expectations for student success (Calkins et al., 2007).

The structure established for turnaround schools was fundamentally different from the typical structure of public schools. Turnaround principals were afforded decision-making power and access to increased funding and/or resources that were not typical in traditional schools (Calkins et al., 2007). This heightened degree of authority over people, time and money was met by the expectation for rapid improvement in student achievement. Kotter (1996) identified eight stages in the change process that were incorporated into literature on turnaround leadership:

1. Establish a sense of urgency,
2. Build a powerful guiding coalition,
3. Develop a vision,
4. Communicate the change decision,
5. Empower others to act on the vision,
6. Plan for and create short-term wins,
7. Consolidate improvements and sustain momentum, and
8. Institutionalize new approaches.

Turnaround leaders were viewed as the force behind a significant cultural change in the focus of their teachers; this first required teachers to focus on student learning as the indicator of the quality of their teaching (Calkins et al., 2007).

Effective leadership in turnaround schools is paramount to success. Kowal et al. (2007) described desirous traits in turnaround leaders which included: problem-solving, decisiveness, drive, vision, resilience, resoluteness, courage, and understanding of people and relationships. Fairchild, Lovelace, DeMary and Shields (2007) described the role of the turnaround specialist as one that integrated: visible authority, decisiveness, emotional resilience, transparency, influence, and the ability to communicate with internal and external stakeholders. Turnaround programs developed in various locales across the nation were designed to cultivate both leadership skills and the prerequisite skill set needed to successfully lead turnaround schools.

Turnaround specialist training programs were developed in a number of states including: Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Missouri, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Texas and Virginia (University of Virginia Darden School of Business, 2010). The Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program (VSTSP) is credited with contributing to the core structure for turnaround programs in these states. Established in the spring of 2004 and designed jointly by the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business and Curry School of Education, the VSTSP trained principals and district supervisors to reform Virginia's lowest-performing schools. There were four Core Essentials to the VSTSP: knowledge and skills, systems and processes, best practices, and real time support (University of Virginia Darden School of Business, 2009). Within

these core areas, key foci included business elements such as the study of organizational behavior, change management, and project management oversight, as well as educational elements such as managed instruction, instructional interventions, and collaboration.

Successful deployment of these strategies requires establishing solid and lasting connections with teachers: “Turnaround is, at its core, a people strategy . . . schooling is fundamentally a human enterprise” (Calkins et al., 2007, p. 48).

The turnaround literature indicates that the degree to which principals’ abilities are aligned with the characteristics and skills sets outlined in the research plays a key role in the efficacy of school reform initiatives. Literature on standards for school principals and tools for evaluating principal leadership reveals that neither common standards nor evaluation tools for educational leaders have been adopted in the nation.

Standards for School Leaders: Guiding Principals towards Best Practice

The ISLLC Standards

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is a national organization comprised of public elementary and secondary school officials representing the 50 states and a number of other jurisdictions (Green, 2009). In 1994, The CCSSO, along with several other national organizations (including the National Policy Board for Educational Administration, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Association for Secondary School Principals, and the National School Boards Association), formed the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC).

The primary work of the ISLLC Consortium was to develop national standards for school leaders. These standards, known as the ISSLC Standards, were published in 1996.

The overarching purpose of the ISLLC Standards was to provide educational leaders with guidelines to improve leadership, which would, in turn, result in improved student achievement. The Consortium envisioned professional development and evaluation efforts emanating from the Standards. Additionally, the CCSSO anticipated that the ISLLC Standards would impact training provided for new school leaders, as well as the development of educational policy based upon the Standards (Muse, 2008).

The 1996 ISLLC Standards were based upon seven guiding principles that resulted in six standards for school leaders. The 1996 standards were encapsulated in knowledge, dispositions, and performance indicators for school leaders—183 indicators in total. Of these, 43 described knowledge, 43 referred to dispositions, and 97 described performance indicators or outcomes (CCSSO, 1996; Green, 2009). The essential components of the standards identified by Green are illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3

Essential Components of the ISLLC Standards

Standard	Descriptors
A Vision of Learning	Facilitation, Challenges, Strategic Planning, Leadership Capacity, Stakeholder Involvement
School Focus on Teaching and Learning	Culture, Instructional Program, Student Learning, Professional Growth
Managing School Operations	Coordinating, Organizing, Planning, Resource Acquisition and Management, Ensuring Safe Schools
Building Effective Interpersonal Relationships	Respecting Diversity, Assessing Community Interests and Needs, Utilizing Community Resources, Collaboration
Leading with Integrity in a Fair and Ethical Manner	Integrity, Fairness, Ethics
Understanding the Political, Social, Economic, and Legal Context	Political, Social, Economic, Legal, Culture

Note. Adapted from “Practicing the Art of Leadership: A Problem-Based Approach to Implementing the ISLLC Standards,” 3rd ed., by R. L. Green, 2009. Copyright 2009 by Pearson Education.

Sharp, Walter, and Sharp (1998) argued that the six performance standards were of great value to school leaders. They asserted that the active nature of leadership required a focus on performance as the impetus for change. Green (2009) also asserted the value of the ISLLC Standards. Green suggested that leadership preparation programs for prospective leaders and professional development for current leaders should include a study of the practical applications of the ISLLC performance indicators, potentially guided by case study scenarios based upon the Standards.

ISLLC 2008: Educational Leadership Policy Standards

In 2008, a revised version of the ISLLC Standards, ISLLC 2008, was published. The standards were revised by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Steering Committee, members of which included the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, National Association of Elementary School Principals, National Association of Secondary School Principals, National School Boards Association, and University Council for Educational Administration. An extensive review of the literature that was the basis for the revised standards was supported by The Wallace Foundation.

The ISLLC 2008 Standards were written with an increased focus on guiding policy, and with continued emphasis on professional development and administrator preparation. Though this increased emphasis on policy was noted repeatedly in the literature, the ISLLC 2008 Standards are remarkably similar, and in some cases identical to, ISSLC 1996 Standards. Table 4 illustrates the similarity between the wordings of the standards at the highest level.

Table 4

Comparison of ISLLC 1996 and ISLLC 2008 Standards

	ISLLC 1996	ISLLC 2008
Standard	<i>A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by:</i>	An education leader promotes the success of <i>every student</i> by:
Standard 1	facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by <i>the school community</i> .	facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by <i>all stakeholders</i> .
Standard 2	advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.	advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.
Standard 3	ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.	ensuring management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.
Standard 4	collaborating with <i>families</i> and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.	collaborating with <i>faculty</i> and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.
Standard 5	acting with integrity, <i>with</i> fairness, and in an ethical manner.	acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.
Standard 6	understanding, responding to, and influencing the <i>larger</i> political, social, economic, legal, and cultural <i>contexts</i> . (CCSSO, 1996, p. 6)	understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural <i>context</i> . (CCSSO, 2008, p. 14-15)

Note. Italics added.

Two key differences between the 1996 and 2008 Standards were the indicators and functions. The 2008 Standards did not include the 183 indicators of knowledge,

dispositions or performance that were a part of the 1996 Standards. These indicators were perceived by the field to be too limiting and restrictive (CCSSO, 2008). Instead, each of the current standards was developed with a description of corresponding functions that provides detail about the themes upon which school leader may focus to implement the Standard. For example, the functions of Standard 1 (facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders), were:

- Collaboratively develop and implement a shared vision and mission,
- Collect and use data to identify goals, assess organizational effectiveness, and promote organizational learning,
- Create and implement plans to achieve goals,
- Promote continuous and sustainable improvement, and
- Monitor and evaluate progress and revise plans. (CCSSO, 2008, p. 14)

Although ISLLC 2008 did not include an evaluative component, the literature recommended linking performance-based measures for school leaders with the ISLLC Standards to create an aligned system for the evaluation of school leadership (CCSSO, 2008).

Other Standards for Educational Leaders

Though the ISSLC Standards are national, comprehensive standards, they are not the only standards that exist for school leaders. As noted earlier, Sergiovanni (2007) argued that effective school leaders needed to master eight basic competencies: (a) the

management of attention, (b) the management of meaning, (c) the management of trust, (d) the management of self, (e) the management of paradox, (f) the management of effectiveness, (g) the management of follow-up, and (h) the management of responsibility. McEwan (2003) developed seven standards for school leaders, each with a number of indicators and a scale of descriptors by which to measure competency. McEwan's standards included being an instructional resource for staff, creating a school culture and climate for learning and communicating the school's vision and mission. The National Association for Elementary School Principals (NAESP) established standards for school leaders that included a focus on content and instruction, school culture, and data analysis (NAESP, 2001).

The research on and the development of standards for school leaders reflects the increased focus on accountability and student achievement in our nation. The nationally developed ISLLC Standards (CCSSO, 1996; CCSSO, 2008) were intended to guide states' policies and to inform school leaders' practice. A review of evaluation tools for school leaders reveals that, prior to 2008, validated measures to assess principal leadership were absent in school districts across the nation.

Evaluating Principal Leadership

Overview

Goldring et al. (2009) found that four approaches were suggested to assess school leadership: responsibilities, knowledge and skills, processes, and organizational outcomes. Responsibilities included specific job tasks such as managing programs, personnel, discipline, and professional development. Knowledge and skills referred to

leadership elements such as listening skills and presentation skills. Processes referred primarily to school improvement processes. Organizational outcomes referred to the assessment of measurable objectives such as drop-out rates and student achievement.

A review of the principal evaluation practices in 74 school districts across 43 states nationwide revealed that at least 74 different instruments were used (Goldring et al., 2009). Assessment instruments ranged from fewer than 10 items to over 180 items, with one instrument in a completely narrative form. In many instances, school district personnel were unable to articulate how principals in their districts were evaluated. Goldring et al. identified four broad categories of evaluation items in the instruments that they evaluated: (a) school and instruction, (b) management, (c) external environment, and (d) personal characteristics. Though instruments varied with respect to the degree to which each emphasized the four categories, most instruments focused on school and instruction most heavily. There was no evidence of validity or reliability for 91% of the instruments evaluated.

VAL-ED

The literature accompanying the 2008 release of the revised ISLLC Standards included a recommendation that states develop performance-based measures aligned with the Standards (CCSSO, 2008). The Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-ED) was referenced in the literature as a soon-to-be released evaluation tool linking principal evaluation with the ISLLC Standards (CCSSO, 2008). VAL-ED was developed by Murphy and colleagues after a three year study conducted through Vanderbilt University and funded by The Wallace Foundation. Murphy brought a wealth

of experience to this endeavor, as he served as Chairman of ISLLC when the 1996 ISLLC Standards were originally developed. Murphy et al. (2007) pointed to research on the inadequacy of instruments to assess principal leadership as a key factor in the development of VAL-ED.

VAL-ED was constructed to measure effective school leadership behaviors that influence student learning. The 72-item survey is a “360 degree” assessment—it can be completed by principals, supervisors, and teachers. Principal effectiveness is rated on a Likert scale with five indicators: ineffective, minimally effective, satisfactorily effective, highly effective, and outstandingly effective. Respondents are directed to consider what evidence impacts their rating. Sources of evidence may include personal observation, reports from others, school documents, school projects or activities, other sources, or no evidence. Raters are directed to consider quality over quantity; however, if no evidence exists for a particular indicator, ineffective must be selected on the scale. Principals respond to the stem, “How effective *are you* at ensuring the school . . .” while teachers and administrators respond to the stem, “How effective *is the principal* at ensuring the school . . .” (italics added). The principal’s performance is evaluated based upon evidence noted in the current school year.

Murphy et al. explained that VAL-ED was designed to incorporate eight features: (a) to work well in a variety of settings and circumstances, (b) to be construct valid, (c) to be reliable, (d) to be unbiased, (e) to provide accurate and useful reporting results, (f) to yield diagnostic profiles for formative purposes, (g) to be used to measure progress over time in the development of leadership, and (h) to predict important outcomes (2007, p.

24). VAL-ED was extensively field tested to determine validity and reliability, with over 800 participants in two field tests. The revised instrument contained items with 86% or higher inter-rater agreement. Chronbach's Alpha for all subscales was 90% or higher. A fairness review was also conducted on VAL-ED. The review and subsequent item revision resulted in survey items and instructions that meet or exceeded widely accepted fairness criteria for this type of instrument (Elliott & Frank, 2008). A study comparing eight publicly-available principal evaluation tools highlighted VAL-ED's high degree of validity and reliability, as well as the thorough research base supporting the conceptual framework from which VAL-ED was developed (Condon & Clifford, 2009; Maxwell, 2009).

The conceptual model for VAL-ED was based upon the Murphy et al. (2007) definition of leadership as "the process of influencing others to achieve mutually agreed upon purposes for the organization" (p. 2). Murphy et al. accepted the widely supported finding that the influence of principal leadership on student outcomes is indirect (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2004). The influence of principals on student achievement is therefore based upon how effectively principals affect the school organization. The leadership model that Murphy et al. developed based upon their research is called "learning-centered leadership" (Murphy et al., 2006). This model delineates the elements of school leadership in terms of precursors, behaviors, influence pathways, and outcomes. Precursors include the knowledge, experience, personal characteristics, and values and beliefs that the school leader possesses. These precursors influence leadership behaviors, which in turn influence the school and classroom. The

principal's influence upon the school and classroom is described as the influence pathway. All three of these elements are influenced by the context in which the school, district, and state are situated. Finally, the precursors, behaviors, and influence pathway lead to outcomes, which are described in terms of student success. The framework for this conceptual model is displayed in Figure 2.

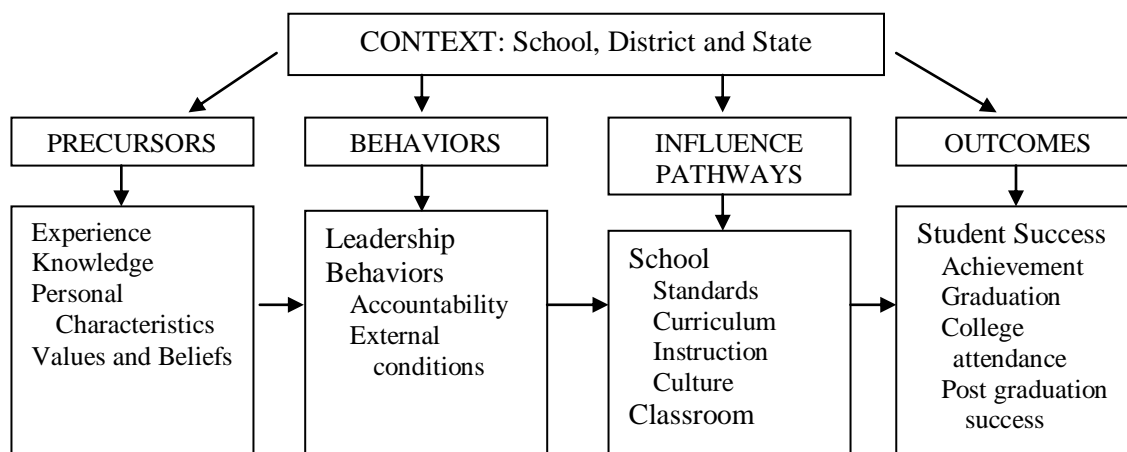


Figure 2. Learning-centered leadership framework. Elements identified by Murphy et al. as contributing to the model of learning-centered leadership. Adapted from “The Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education: Measuring Learning-Centered Leadership” by J. F. Murphy et al. Copyright 2007 by The Wallace Foundation.

Murphy et al. (2007) identified six core components and six key processes of learning-centered leadership. These formed the basis for VAL-ED. Core components and key processes were selected based upon their identification in literature as factors in enhancing teachers' ability to improve instruction and increase student outcomes. The core components and key processes were aligned with the conceptual foundation for learning-centered leadership developed by Murphy et al. (2006) (Table 5).

Table 5

Alignment of VAL-ED Core Components and Key Processes to Conceptual Foundation for Learning-Centered Leadership

	Name	Conceptual Foundation for Leadership Practices
Core Components of School Performance	High Standards for Student Learning	Establishment of goals for rigorous academic and social learning; systematic praise and reward for high-quality teaching and learning; well-developed and comprehensive assessment system
	Rigorous Curriculum	School-wide rigorous curricular program; each student has an individualized high-quality program
	Quality Instruction	Effective instructional practices maximize student learning; frequent observation and collaboration with teachers
	Culture of Learning and Professional Behavior	Supreme focus on student learning; shared leadership, collaboration, collective values and commitment
	Connections to External Communities	Ceaseless communication with family and community stakeholders to promote the schools mission, vision and goals
	Performance Accountability	Mutual accountability and collective responsibility for externally imposed and internally established learning goals for students
Key Processes of Leadership	Planning	Engagement in careful planning of instructional practices, policies and procedures for accelerating student performance.
	Implementing	High level of staff engagement to implement the school's mission, vision and instructional initiatives
	Supporting	Devotion of substantial amount of time to assist teachers in increasing capacity, developing staff and community cohesion, furthering school improvement efforts
	Advocating	Service as social advocates promoting the needs of each student within and beyond school
	Communicating	Development of systems of communication with and among teachers regarding instruction, curriculum, and assessments, with parents and the community stakeholders,
	Monitoring	Aggressive monitoring of school's instructional and assessment programs

Upon completion of an administration of VAL-ED (whether taken by the principal, teacher(s), supervisor(s), or some combination), the principal receives a profile of his or her learning-centered leadership behaviors. The report provides norm-referenced and criterion-referenced scores on each of the core processes and key components, as well as an overall effectiveness score. Scores are reported by mean, performance level (below basic, basic, proficient, or distinguished), and percentile ranks. Sources of evidence are summarized, and rankings provided by respondent groups are also reported. A matrix which shows the performance levels for each intersection of core components and key processes is provided, followed by recommended areas for improvement and professional growth based upon the data.

Summary

The role of the principal has evolved over the past decades in response to political, social and economic circumstances affecting the nation. Today's principals bear the burden of increased responsibility for student achievement as defined by NCLB. Contextual factors also influence the principalship. Rural school principals are faced with unique challenges such as limited resources and cultural factors. The recent focus on academic proficiency for all students has resulted in a focus on school change. Dramatic change, referred to as turnaround, has emerged as distinctly different from school improvement; turnaround principles were developed to reform the lowest-performing schools, which are often at risk of restructuring or school closure. A wealth of research on change was incorporated into principles and practices developed for turnaround schools.

Principal leadership can be conceptualized in a number of ways. The nationally developed ISLLC Standards, intended to guide policy and to serve as a basis for designing professional development and administrator preparation programs, offer a widely recognized framework for defining effective principal leadership. Murphy et al. (2007) developed VAL-ED, an ISLLC-aligned evaluation tool for principal leadership that is research-based, comprehensive, and based upon their framework of learning-centered leadership. VAL-ED may be used by school leaders, supervisors, and/or teachers to measure principal effectiveness based upon evidence-based criteria. VAL-ED was intended to bridge the gap between the nationally established ISLLC Standards and a performance-based measure of those Standards. The principal performance results provided by VAL-ED were designed to assist school and district leaders in determining professional development for school leaders based upon identified needs.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study investigated how a principal in a low-performing middle school in a rural school district in Virginia prepared for and led his school through the administration of SOL testing during his first year as principal. The VAL-ED theoretical framework, which conceptualizes learning-centered leadership as comprised of six core components and six key processes, provided the lens through which the principal's leadership behaviors and practices were identified and explored. Specifically, the principal's role as he endeavored to improve student achievement was analyzed.

According to Maxwell (2005), qualitative research is appropriate when the researcher seeks to understand meanings, context, and processes of the phenomena under study, as well as to generate grounded theories and develop causal explanations. Creswell (1998) asserted that the qualitative methodology should be employed when variables and theories are not easily identifiable to explain the population under study in the natural setting, and when there is a need to present a detailed view of the topic.

To complete this qualitative investigation, multiple perspectives were gained through extensive data collection and analysis. The participants' experiences and perceptions were accessed through in-depth interviews; documents and artifacts provided triangulation and additional layers of meaning. ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software was used to store and code data.

Setting

The pseudonyms Countryville School District and Countryville Middle School were used to protect the confidentiality of the school community. Pseudonyms were used for all participants in the study.

The School District

This study was conducted in and around a middle school located in a rural school district in Virginia. Countryville School District was defined as a rural school district by the Virginia Department of Education (2009d). Located between two urban areas, Countryville gained popularity in the last several years as a bedroom community. Within the last five years, a number of new subdivisions developed in the county, with homes priced in the range of \$1 million. New developments bordered forests, fields and farmland. Central water and sewer were installed throughout the county, and these amenities were expected to encourage business and industry to come to Countryville.

Countryville could most accurately have been described as a county in transition. Although an upward swing in real estate and development was noticeable in the county, this was not mirrored by comparable changes within the school district. In a 2007 study sponsored by the Virginia Education Association, Countryville ranked in the top quartile in fiscal capacity, based upon the local composite index, but fell to the mid-range in effort with respect to school funding amongst all school districts in the state (Donohue & Shotwell, 2009). The average teacher salary in Countryville was ranked in the bottom third of districts in the state. The district ranked in the bottom quartile in total cost of operation per pupil. Countryville ranked in the bottom quartile in both state and local funds received for cost of operations, and also for the number of instructional personnel

per 1,000 students in Average Daily Membership. In total pupil disbursement, Countryville ranked almost last of all school districts in the state (Donohue & Shotwell, 2009).

The economically disadvantaged population in Countryville school district as measured by the percentage of students who qualified for and receive free or reduced lunch was below 20% (Virginia Department of Education, 2009b). The ethnic breakdown for the school district was 80% white, 15% black, and less than 5% Hispanic, American Indian, and Asian. The student population was less than 3,000 (Virginia Department of Education, 2009c).

The allocation of local tax dollars to the schools caused contention among Countryville residents. Historically, it was common for some taxpayers to vocally oppose spending additional funds on school facilities or operations. It was less common for taxpayers to speak out in favor of the schools. The age of the school facilities ranged from two years old to 55 years old. Some renovations had been completed on the oldest facilities. Attempts to build new facilities historically failed in referendums.

Due to limited funding, Countryville Schools were not able to offer some of the curricular opportunities that were offered in neighboring school districts. At the elementary level, the art instructor was stretched between multiple schools and world languages were offered on a very limited basis. At the middle school level, only limited exploratory electives were offered. Spanish was the only world language offered at the middle school level. At the high school level, elective offerings were also limited.

Recruitment and retention of teachers was a challenge in Countryville. Limited affordable housing and a salary lower than neighboring school districts presented challenges to hiring. The school district struggled to retain fully licensed, highly qualified teachers, especially in the areas of special education, mathematics, science, and Career and Technical Education.

The Focus School

Countryville Middle School served a grade span of sixth through eighth grade. The student enrollment in Countryville Middle School was under 800. A recent school relocation allowed for increased technology and an improved learning environment for students; however, the facility was not without concerns. The school's layout was planned for departmentalized, as opposed to team, teaching. Classrooms could not be organized geographically to facilitate the movement of students between teacher teams, as is common in middle schools. The school was designed as an open campus, with many entry and exit points to the school, several of which remain unlocked throughout the day to allow access to and from the physical fitness track and fields, and also for students attending classes in rooms located in trailers.

In 2009, the principal of Countryville Middle School retired after over 30 years in the position. The assistant principal of the school was reassigned to another location. Challenges facing the new principal leader could be categorized into the areas of student achievement, school culture, and staffing.

Student achievement challenges.

- Failure to meet AYP benchmarks for five years in a row, resulting in a School Improvement designation,
- Extremely low pass rates in sixth and seventh grade mathematics (pass rate for students with disabilities below 30%),
- Lack of well-developed curricula, reflected in the absences of scope and sequence and pacing guides in some subjects, and
- Poorly developed assessments in place for the districts' required benchmark testing system, with a history of some teachers improperly administering the benchmark assessments (for example, by giving inappropriate assistance).

School culture challenges.

- Ineffective implementation of Professional Learning Communities within the school,
- A degree of general education teacher reluctance to comply with special education students' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs),
- Lack of success with collaborative teaching teams,
- Reluctance of teachers to comply with new initiatives and to support systemic change, and
- Low staff morale.

Staffing challenges.

- High teacher turnover, particularly in the special education department,

- Two new department heads, with the likelihood that a third would resign the position during the course of the incoming principal's first year, and
- An assistant principal who was also new to the position.

Hence, the incoming principal of Countryville Middle School had a wealth of opportunities to exhibit leadership in order to improve student outcomes.

The Principal

The principal selected as Countryville Middle School's new leader was Charles Billups. Mr. Billups had been an educator for 15 years, and had experience at the middle school and high school levels. He had served as a teacher, an assistant principal, a principal, and also as a central office administrator.

Mr. Billups had a track record of success in improving failing schools. Prior to coming to Countryville, he served as principal in two other rural school districts in the state that were not meeting requirements for AYP or for accreditation. In both schools, Mr. Billups was able to implement improvement strategies that led to increased student success. Both schools became accredited and met AYP under Mr. Billups' leadership.

Mr. Billups was selected by one of his previous school districts to participate in the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program (VSTSP). Although he did not completed the program, Mr. Billups' past history of success, his confidence in his abilities and desire to accept a new leadership challenge, and his turnaround training contributed to the feeling that Mr. Billups was uniquely qualified to successfully overcome challenges and lead reform initiatives at Countryville Middle School.

Research Design

Golafshani (2003) asserted that qualitative researchers employ naturalistic approaches to examining phenomena in settings that are context-specific. While quantitative research goals include determination and generalization of findings, qualitative research goals focus on illuminating and understanding phenomena. In this study, a qualitative design was appropriate because the goals of the study were to investigate, identify, describe, and explain naturally occurring phenomena through the lens of the participants' lived experiences.

Maxwell (2005) recommended developing an interactive, flexible research model when planning a qualitative study. The five components in Maxwell's model were the research goals, the conceptual framework, the research questions (central to the study and connected to all other elements), the methods, and validity. The research goals for this study focused squarely on the in-depth investigation of principal leadership. Embedded in each goal was the analysis of principal behaviors and priorities that impacted student achievement. The conceptual framework supported the study of principal leadership for increased student outcomes. The data collection methods allowed for data gathered from multiple sources to address multiple perspectives on the research questions. Strategies to enhance validity included the use of ATLAS.ti to store and analyze data gathered from multiple sources. The overall research design for this study is displayed in Figure 3.

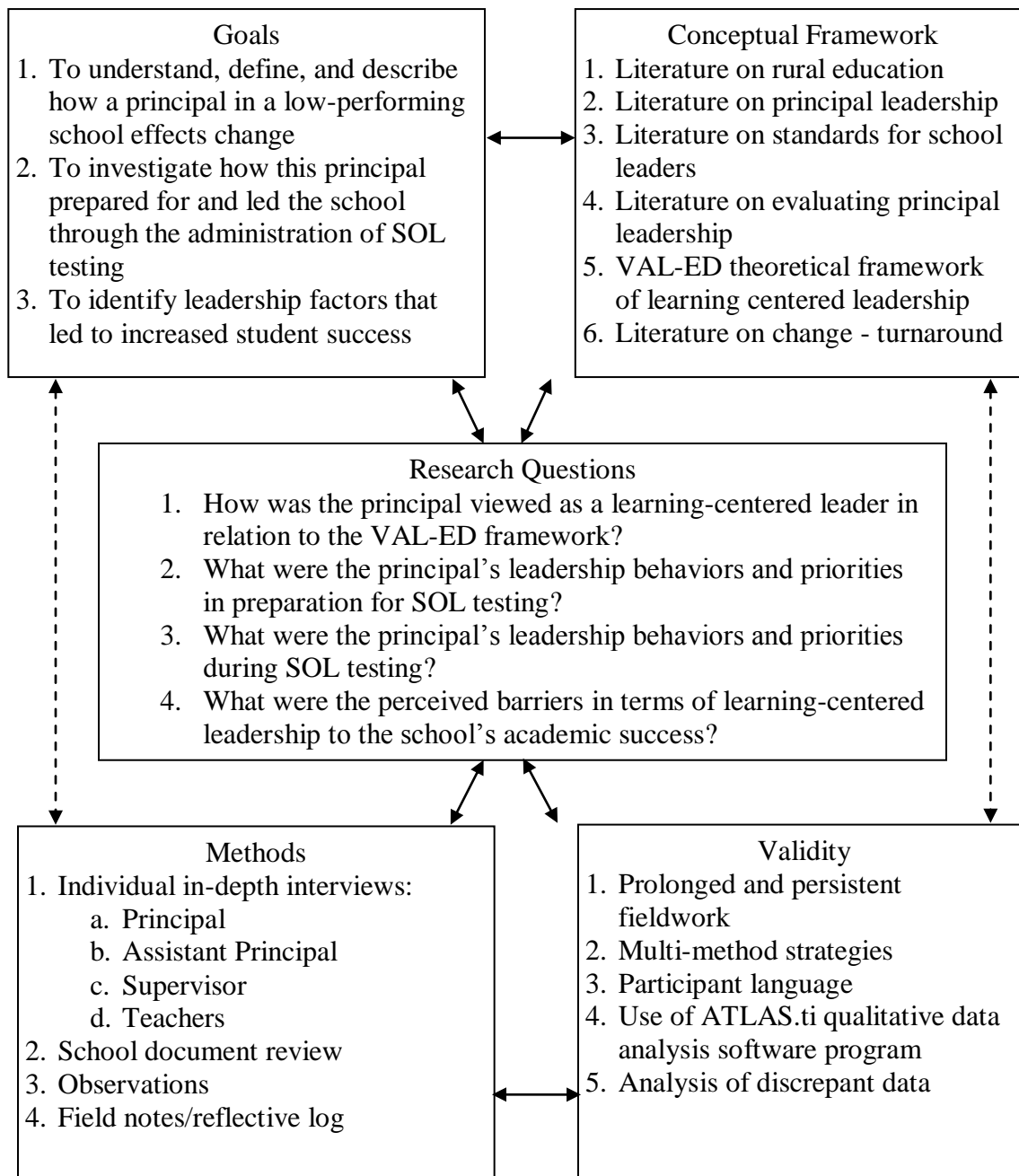


Figure 3. Research Design. The research design for this study includes the five key components identified by Maxwell. Adapted from “Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach” by J. A. Maxwell. Copyright 2005 by SAGE Publications, Inc.

Creswell (1998) argued that a case study design should be employed by researchers examining bounded systems. A system can be bounded by time or place. In this study, the system was bounded by both time and place. Data was collected about the principal's first year at Countryville Middle School, with a specific emphasis on the time period leading up to and during the administration of the spring 2010 SOL assessments (April through June, 2010).

An extensive description of the context is necessary to situate a case in time and space for the reader (Creswell, 1998). Multiple sources of data were collected to describe in detail the program, event, and individual upon which this case study focused. Creswell asserted that a case may be chosen because it is representative or unique; a single setting or multiple settings may be investigated. This study presented aspects that were potentially representative of rural school districts in Virginia, but also elements that were specific to this context. For example, the leadership challenges that the middle school principal in this study faced were representative of rural middle schools across the state. On the other hand, the principal's background and leadership training were specific to this study.

Research Questions

The research questions that formed the basis for inquiry in this study were:

1. How was the principal viewed as a learning-centered leader in relation to the VAL-ED framework?
2. What were the perceived barriers in terms of learning-centered leadership to the school's academic success?

3. What were the principal's leadership behaviors and priorities in preparation for SOL testing?
4. What were the principal's leadership behaviors and priorities during SOL testing?

Participants

The licensed faculty of Countryville Middle School was comprised of one principal, an assistant principal, and 70 additional staff members (see Table 6). In order to gain multiple perspectives on the complexities of this topic, the principal, the assistant principal, the principal's supervisor, and six members of the instructional staff were interviewed. Teacher participants were selected purposefully based upon specific criteria: instructional staff participation was limited to regular education teachers and special education teachers assigned to the core content areas of language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science. These four core content areas were selected because they are the academic areas in which student performance is measured by the SOL assessments. Participants were selected who had a minimum of five years experience at Countryville Middle School. This ensured that participants could, ideally, provide information on Countryville Middle School before and after the principal leadership change. A range of grade levels/staff assignments was included.

Table 6
Countryville Middle School Staff

Job Title	Number of Staff Members
Principal	1
Assistant Principal	1
Administrative Assistant	3
Guidance Counselor	2
Core content area regular and special education teacher (Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies)	45
Resource teacher (P.E., art, music, computer, foreign language, librarian, etc.)	9
Paraprofessional (regular and special education)	9

Data Collection

This investigation of principal leadership incorporated multiple sources of data as recommended by Creswell (1998). Information was gathered through the following means:

- In-depth, semi-structured interviews,
- Analysis of school documents and artifacts,
- Observation, and
- Researcher journal and log.

A semi-structured interview protocol was developed for the initial interviews conducted with each of the participant groups (Appendix A and B). These allowed

participants to express their unique perspectives and perceptions regarding the principal's learning-centered leadership. In accordance with the emergent design, initial interviews were preliminarily coded to develop the second set of interview guides (Appendix C and D).

School documents and artifacts were provided by the principal and included the school's academic improvement plan, agendas and minutes from faculty and school leadership team meetings, and student achievement results from SOL assessments. A researcher journal was kept throughout the data collection process, as well as an activity log. In accordance with the research design (Figure 3, page 62), these data provided triangulation in support of interpretations and to identify discrepant data.

Procedure

To conduct this study, prospectus approval from the dissertation committee, IRB approval from Virginia Commonwealth University, and approval from Countryville school district's superintendent was obtained prior to data collection. Once the study was approved, data collection began. The data collection timeline is provided in Table 7.

Table 7

Data Collection Timeline

Activity	Description / Frequency	Timeline
Principal Interviews	In-depth, semi-structured interviews; 3- 4 interviews lasting 45 minutes - 1 hour each	April-June, 2010
Assistant Principal Interview	In-depth, semi-structured interview; 1 interview lasting 45 minutes - 1 hour	May, 2010
Supervisor Interview	In-depth, semi-structured interview; 2 interviews lasting 45 minutes - 1 hour	May and June, 2010
Teacher Interviews	Semi-structured interview; 2 interviews with each of 6 participants lasting 30-45 minutes	April and June, 2010
Review of documents/artifacts	Researcher review of documents such as school improvement plan, staff meeting agenda and minutes, department head meeting agenda and minutes, VAL-ED pre and post survey results	April-June, 2010
Participant Observations	Researcher to observe and record principal's activities in school setting in daily school interactions; 3-4 observations lasting 15-30 minutes	April-June, 2010
Researcher Journal/Memos/Log	Researcher to record observations, insights, events, and perceptions after each event listed above	April-June, 2010

Once participants were enlisted, an email was sent to each of them providing information about the nature of the study and requesting their participation. Informed consent was gained prior to each initial interview, and a copy of the consent was provided to each participant. All interviews with Countryville Middle School personnel were

scheduled at the participants' convenience and occurred on school or school district grounds. Permission to audio record each interview was obtained.

Each teacher participant was asked the same questions following the basic structure for teacher interviews (Appendix B). Questions were intentionally broad, and probing questions were asked when appropriate. A parallel protocol was prepared for administrative interview participants (Appendix A).

Interview guides for the follow-up interviews with the teachers, the principal, and the principal's supervisor were prepared after the initial series of interviews was conducted and preliminary analysis was completed (Appendix C and D); this allowed for flexibility in topic selection and gave full recognition of the need to facilitate the emergent design. New topics arose during the course of preliminary analysis, which is consistent with qualitative emergent design (Creswell, 1998).

Data Analysis

Creswell (1998) described data analysis as a spiraling process beginning with data collection and resulting in an account or narrative. The four spiraling loops that Creswell identified were: (a) data managing; (b) reading and memoing; (c) describing, classifying, and interpreting; and (d) representing and visualizing. In the data managing stage, data was organized into paper or electronic files. Creswell asserted that computer programs for managing qualitative data could be used as an efficient data management tool. In the reading and memoing phase, Creswell recommended that all data be reviewed several times as part of the data analysis, with the researcher reflecting and taking notes on findings. During the third loop, data was compared and categorized into themes. Creswell

recommended determining no more than five or six themes, although subthemes are likely to emerge. It was during this point in the data analysis process that the researcher synthesized the data to interpret larger meanings and lessons learned. In the final stage, synthesized data was presented in a narrative format.

In this study, data collected was stored and analyzed using the ATLAS.ti program. Much of the interview data was also transcribed and coded using Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. The structure of the descriptive narrative emerged as data was reconstructed and interpreted. Codes emerged from the data; however, a possible coding list from previous studies was generated (Maxwell, 2005). Initial categories included those identified in the VAL-ED theoretical framework (Murphy et al., 2007), which included each of the six core components and key processes. The intersection of core components and key processes presented the potential for 36 distinct categories (Table 8). Categories generated from recent case study research on principal leadership characteristics were also examined for applicability to the data (Table 9).

Preliminary data analysis of initial interview sessions led to the formation of the interview guides for follow-up interview sessions (Appendix C and D). Once all interview data was gathered, all preliminary codes were reconsidered as the entire data set was analyzed. Final codes were developed as a result of multiple reviews of the data set. In this study, member-checking was not utilized via an outside coder. Triangulation was achieved solely through the corroboration of multiple sources of data, which included interview data and the researchers memo and journal.

Table 8

Preliminary Codes for Data Analysis Derived from VAL-ED

Core Components	Key Processes						
		Planning	Implementing	Supporting	Advocating	Communi- cating	Monitoring
	High Standards for Student Learning						
	Rigorous Curriculum						
	Quality Instruction						
	Culture of Learning and Professional Behavior						
	Connections to External Communities						
	Performance Accountability						

Table 9

Preliminary Codes for Data Analysis Derived from Recent Qualitative Case Study Research

Codes	Research Sources		
	Hall, 2009	Sanderlin, 2008	Schofield, 2008
	Clear vision	Clear mission and vision	Philosophy; leadership
	Meaningful curriculum, instruction, and assessments	Effective instructional leader	Curriculum
		Common assessments	
	Student-centered culture	Collaboration; High quality professional development	Relationships; Culture and climate
		Parent involvement	
	Accountability	Accountability	
	School-wide systems	Clear mission and vision	
	Caring, supportive relationships		
	Positive relationships; honest communication		
			Commitment
			Communication

Validity

Maxwell described validity, which is often termed credibility in qualitative research, as the “correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account” (2005, p. 106). To strengthen the validity of conclusions, Maxwell recommended several strategies. In this study, validity was strengthened through the collection of rich data, respondent validation, reporting and analyzing discrepant data and comparison.

Threats to credibility include researcher bias and reactivity. Maxwell (2005) stated that eliminating these threats is not the goal of qualitative research design; rather, researchers must be aware of how their perceptions influence their interpretations of the data (researcher bias). Researchers also must understand how they influence interviews or observations (reactivity). In this study, the researcher's role as a K-12 educator, her familiarity with the selected school district, and her past history as a building administrator may have influenced the responses of participants, and may have impacted teacher and administrator behaviors during observations.

Generalizability

In qualitative research, generalizability is conceptualized as transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Maxwell (2005) distinguished between internal and external generalizability. Internal generalizability, which Maxwell described as a key issue in qualitative research, is strengthened when the researcher interprets the data in total; discrepant data must be included in the analysis. External generalizability is not guaranteed in qualitative study. In this study, the research conditions were not controlled; they were naturally occurring in this particular setting with these identified participants. However, elements described in the context of this study may be representative of a number of districts across the state and across the nation. Researchers and practitioners may determine that they can benefit from the conclusions drawn in this in-depth study of rural principal leadership.

Summary

This qualitative case study investigated one rural middle school principal's leadership throughout his first year in a low-performing school during which he prepared for and supervised the spring 2010 SOL testing administration. The principal's leadership was examined in terms of the learning-centered leadership framework developed by Murphy et al. (2006, 2007). Data collection included in-depth, semi-structured interviews, an analysis of school documents and artifacts, observation, and a researcher journal and log. Data was stored and analyzed using ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software. Codes and themes were derived throughout the data collection and analysis process; however, a possible coding list of codes derived from the VAL-ED theoretical framework and recent qualitative research on principal leadership, was generated. Results of this study are generalizable to the extent that researchers and practitioners determine similarities between key characteristics described in this study and similar schools environments of their interest.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Overview

Data were gathered over a three-month period before and after the administration of the spring 2010 SOL assessments (April-June). Prior to the administration of the SOL assessments in late May and early June, data were collected from nine interview participants during a total of 11 interviews. Preliminary analysis of data from session one of all teacher interviews, the assistant principal interview, the principal's supervisor interview and sessions one through three of the principal interview (Appendix A and B), as well as recorded observation and the researcher journal, guided the development of the follow-up interview questions (Appendix C and D). After the SOL assessments were administered and preliminary SOL testing results were compiled, follow-up interviews were conducted with participants. One teacher participant was unavailable to complete the follow-up interview session. Documents such as the school improvement plan, benchmark test scores, and AYP data were also gathered and analyzed; these data supported the interpretations of interview data.

Participants described the principal's leadership in terms of learning-centered leadership that encompassed more than the specific behaviors associated with SOL testing preparation and administration; the entire year was perceived as germane to the preparation for and administration of the SOL assessments. The analysis of data provided by interview participants indicated two distinct *families* into which the data could be divided: (a) VAL-ED/Learning-Centered Leadership, and (b) Change. These families represent the highest level of categorization in this analysis. The majority of the data

comprised the VAL-ED/Learning-Centered Leadership family. However, respondents provided data that were not related to this family, and were best conceptualized as the separate family called Change. Within each family, a number of *themes* emerged as coded data were analyzed. Themes were major categories or patterns identified in the data. Within a number of themes, minor categories or *sub-themes* emerged (see Figures 4 and 5).

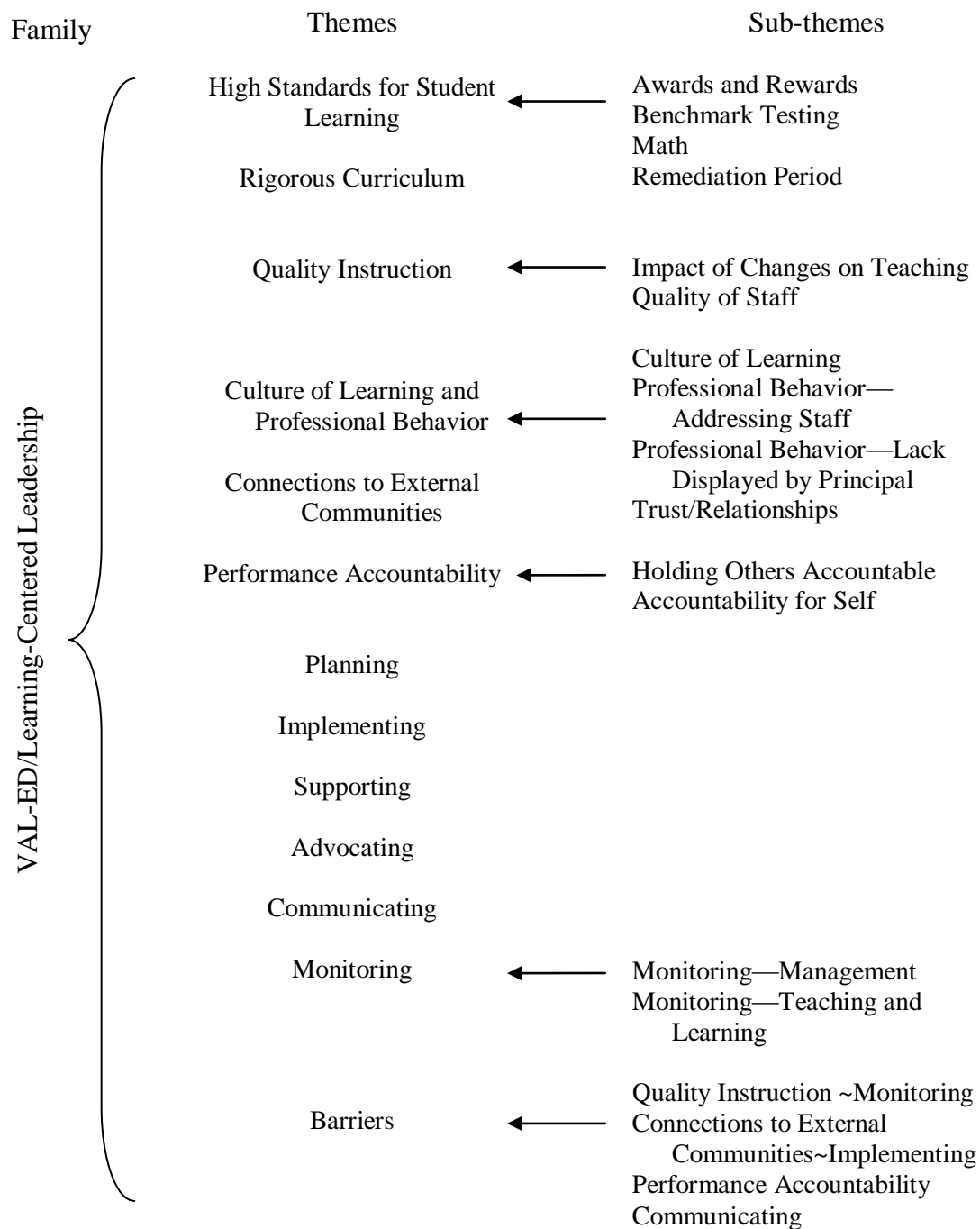


Figure 4. Data Analysis of Research Findings: Themes and Sub-themes Identified in the VAL-ED/Learning-Centered Leadership Family.

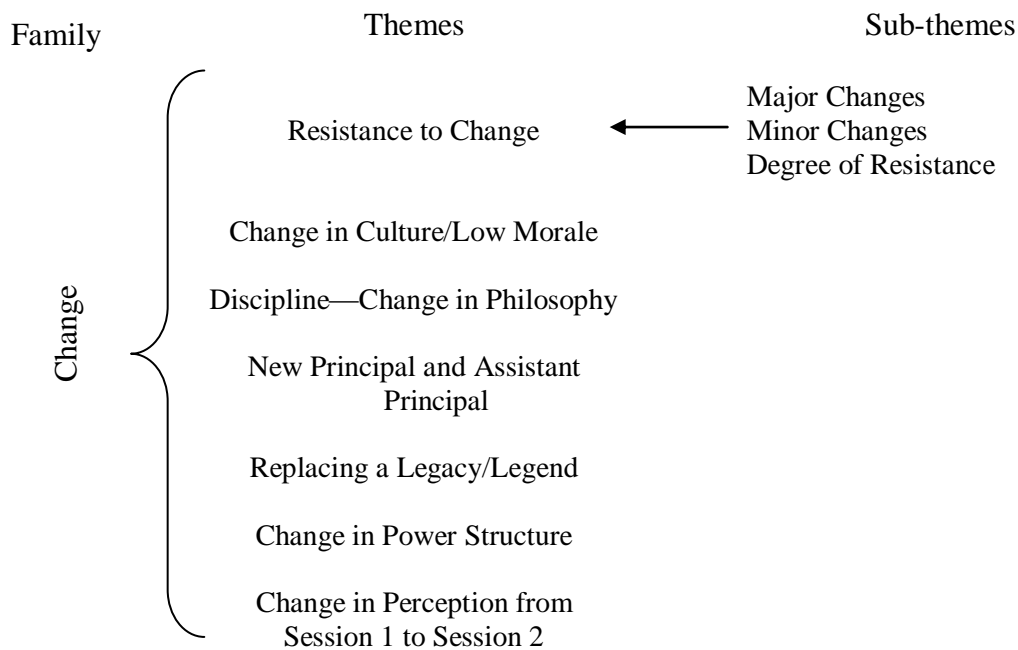


Figure 5. Data Analysis of Research Findings: Themes and Sub-themes Identified in the Change Family.

Figures 4 and 5 provided the conceptual schema for the following analysis by creating a global topography of the total data set. References to these figures will help the reader anchor the interpretations at the macro level. Findings on VAL-ED/Learning Centered Leadership are best explained in the context of each of the four research questions. Non-interview data pertaining to the six core components and six key processes follows the analysis of the themes presented in relation to Research Question One. Themes identified as barriers are presented in relation to Research Question Two; these data include interview data as well as data gathered from the two administrations of the VAL-ED survey. Interview data pertaining to Research Questions Three and Four are presented next. Findings on Change follow in a separate analysis. As a post-script, Countryville Middle School's 2010 AYP and Accreditation data, released to the public

by the Virginia Department of Education subsequent to the end of the data collection period, is reviewed. An outline for the presentation of data is provided below (Figure 6).

Outline for Presentation of Data	
Findings—VAL-ED/Learning Centered Leadership	
Research Question One	
Interview Data on Core Components and Key Processes	
Core Component 1: High Standards for Student Learning	
Core Component 2: Rigorous Curriculum	
Core Component 3: Quality Instruction	
Core Component 4: Culture of Learning and Professional Behavior	
Core Component 5: Connections to External Communities	
Core Component 6: Performance Accountability	
Key Process 1: Planning	
Key Process 2: Implementing	
Key Process 3: Supporting	
Key Process 4: Advocating	
Key Process 5: Communicating	
Key Process 6: Monitoring	
Non-interview Data Relevant to Research Question One	
Research Question Two	
Interview Data Identifying Barriers	
VAL-ED Survey Responses Identifying Barriers	
Research Question Three	
Research Question Four	
Findings—Change	
Countryville Middle School's AYP and Accreditation Data	

Figure 6: Outline for Presentation of Data.

Findings – VAL-ED/Learning Centered Leadership

Research Question One: How was the principal viewed as a learning-centered leader in relation to the VAL-ED framework?

In the initial interview session, all interview participants were asked to respond to prompts about Mr. Billup's leadership with respect to each of the six VAL-ED core

components and six key processes (Appendix A and B). Participants who completed the second interview session were asked to comment on prevalent themes from the first session (Appendix C and D). Responses from all interviews were then analyzed for patterns and discrepancies. The synthesized responses to questions related to the themes comprised of the core components and key processes presents a complex picture of Mr. Billups' learning-centered leadership. The following analyses consider data related to each of the six core components separately.

Core component 1: High standards for student learning. Participants commented more on Mr. Billups' leadership as it pertained to high standards for student learning than they did on any other area; there were 70 instances of participant responses that directly related to this theme. Of these, 49 were positive in nature and 21 were negative in nature. The majority of participants felt that the principal's practice demonstrated high standards for student learning. Mr. Billups himself stated, "high expectations for student learning are the number one priority" (Principal, Session 3). Four out of six teacher participants concurred that high expectations had clearly been communicated to them, and this was echoed by the assistant principal and the principal's supervisor:

[Mr. Billups] has made it quite clear from the very beginning what his expectations are. . . . He kept saying acceleration. What we need for those [special education] kids is acceleration, not remediation. There have been higher expectations and the teachers are starting to meet those expectations. We set the bar pretty high. We set out to change. (Assistant Principal)

The four sub-themes that emerged to support the participants' perceptions of the principal's performance in this theme were: awards and rewards, benchmark testing, mathematics, and the remediation period.

Awards and rewards. Participants expressed concerns regarding Mr. Billup's management of awards and rewards. The overall perception was that the principal had conveyed his intention to celebrate academic successes by instituting awards and rewards, but that his intentions had not translated into action or implementation. The school-wide practices of holding honor roll assemblies and recognizing students who earned a perfect score of 600 on one or more SOL tests were continued from the past administration. Teachers noted that they had proposed a new incentive program for 8th graders with no response from Mr. Billups; this program was re-proposed with student input and was approved. Teacher participants who spoke about this felt that the principal highly valued student input. The principal, whose reflective comments mirrored those provided by the other participants on multiple occasions, stated, "we need to continue working on [awards and rewards to recognize achievement]--that's my personal challenge" (Principal, Session 2).

Benchmark testing. One of Mr. Billup's key focus areas for the school year was the successful implementation of nine-week benchmark assessments in the core subject areas. Prior to Mr. Billup's arrival, benchmark tests had been administered at Countryville Middle School with inconsistent results. The accuracy of these tests came into question in prior years due to technical problems and logistical issues. Mr. Billups was a strong advocate of benchmark testing, and planned to increase the frequency of

each benchmark testing administration from nine weeks to four-and-a-half weeks. With help from his central office supervisor, Mr. Billups purchased a new testing bank from which benchmark test items were selected. He anticipated that the data gathered from each benchmark testing administration would be of key importance to improving student achievement throughout the school year.

However, as in past years, technical problems plagued the benchmark testing administrations at Countryville Middle School. There were issues with log-ins and test access for students who tested online, and problems with scanning and scoring for students who tested using paper-and-pencil forms. Test item content was also questioned, and consequently score reporting was not considered accurate.

Participants' responses to Mr. Billup's role in and responsibility for benchmark testing varied. The majority of participants felt that Mr. Billups was doing the best he could do with limited resources, and some applauded him for his continued efforts: "He really does try with those tests. He has put his heart and soul into them and he works really hard and tries to get those tests prepared for us" (Teacher 2, Session 1). Other participants were frustrated by the benchmark tests and felt that Mr. Billups failed to assume an adequate degree of responsibility for their administration. One teacher described the benchmark administrations as "completely chaotic," and "a joke," commenting that: "I don't think that our results are valid. We put all this pressure on these students. Come SOLs, are they really going to take them seriously?" (Teacher 4, Session 1).

Mr. Billups described benchmark testing as one of his biggest hurdles, and strongly voiced the need to improve on the benchmark tests to move forward academically. Although results for the third nine weeks benchmark testing administration provided the school with usable and useful data, Mr. Billups assessed the overall administration as poor, and said he would give himself an “overall grade of an F—50 percent effective” (Principal, Session 4).

Mathematics. Although district leaders budgeted for and attempted to hire a Mathematics Specialist at Countryville Middle School during the 2009-2010 school year, recruiting a certified Mathematics Specialist proved impossible. In the absence of a Mathematics Specialist, teacher participants praised Mr. Billups for securing the services of a mathematics consultant during the second half of the school year. The hiring of this consultant was viewed as evidence that Mr. Billups had high standards for student learning. Participant comments ranged from general praise for the consultant--“the math consultant was a huge, huge plus” (Teacher 5, Session 2)--to specifically crediting the presences of the consultant with changes in teaching and learning: “In math, specifically, the consultant that we used did change some practices” (Supervisor, Session 2). Approximately half of the participants commented positively on the efficacy of this additional resource.

Remediation period. One of the immediate changes that Mr. Billups made when he became principal of Countryville Middle School was to alter the school’s master schedule. Mr. Billups condensed separated reading and writing periods into a combined language arts block, creating room for a remediation period in the school day. This

change was commented on positively by the majority of interview participants, and in particular by the principal's supervisor:

He did implement . . . a mandatory remediation program in his building that teachers are required to adhere to. And I would say, from my knowledge, that has probably been the best planned and the best implemented program in the building this year. (Supervisor, Session 1)

Core component 2: Rigorous curriculum. Only eight comments were made during the course of the interviews that addressed the degree to which the principal's leadership focused on a rigorous curriculum at Countryville Middle School. Five of these comments were positive in nature, and three were negative in nature. Teachers pointed to Mr. Billups' emphasis on keeping up with scope and sequence and pacing guides as evidence of his emphasis on rigor. The assistant principal added that Mr. Billups encouraged teachers to move beyond the minimum standards evaluated by the SOL assessments, and to focus on enrichment and advancement. The principal's supervisor noted that Mr. Billups was engaged in planning the addition of high school credit courses and new elective courses into the curriculum as funds became available.

The principal himself, as well as two teacher participants, did not view the curriculum as rigorous. Teacher participants noted concerns with the curricular expectations for special education students and a lack of advanced offerings in science and history as indicative of the lack of rigor. The principal described the need to ensure that teachers were teaching an adequate curriculum before pursuing rigor. He described his leadership in this area as focusing on an "adequate curriculum," stating, "We are on a

pathway to rigor, but we're not there yet. We are making strides, and my goal is for a very rigorous curriculum" (Principal, Session 3).

Core component 3: Quality instruction. Twenty-five participant comments contributed to a view of Mr. Billups' leadership priorities in the area of quality instruction. Eight of these comments were positive, 13 were negative, and 4 were neutral. In addition to discussing quality instruction in general terms, participant responses also centered on the sub-themes of the impact of changes on teaching and the quality of staff.

In general, the changes made in the master schedule that also incorporated the remediation period into the school day were seen as factors that positively influenced quality instruction. Participants noted that Mr. Billups had a "very strong desire" for quality instruction (Teacher 3, Session 2), with one participant asserting, "He's a stickler. He will call you on it" (Teacher 6, Session 1). The assistant principal and the principal's supervisor both noted that quality instruction was a leadership priority for the principal.

Impact of changes on teaching. Of the 10 comments addressing the impact of the changes made through the course of the year on teaching, three were positive. Mr. Billups' supervisor expressed concern that the principal had not spent significant periods of time in the classroom completing observations and subsequently providing the teachers with instructional feedback: "Without those observations and feedback to teachers, I don't know that there really can be that much change in teaching (Supervisor, Session 2).

Teacher participants also noted that they had not been observed during the course of the school year, or if they had been visited, they had not received any formal or informal feedback from observations. One teacher explained:

He's been in here one time. So, I don't know, I guess I don't feel like he has a good grasp of what I do in here, enough to—and he never says anything good or bad about what goes on, but sometimes you want the good or you want to know if you need some, you know if you need an area of concern. And I don't know if maybe he's focusing on new teachers or other teachers, but I haven't gotten a lot of feedback on that, so honestly I couldn't tell you where I stood in his eyes. You know, I don't know if he thinks I'm a good teacher or a bad teacher or indifferent. I just, I don't get a lot of feedback with that. (Teacher 2, Session 1)

Mr. Billups expressed his frustration over not being able to spend more time in the classroom, stating “There's not enough of me to go around” (Principal, Session 3). While he expressed pleasure over the degree to which he felt that the central office of Countryville school district included building administrators in decision-making and kept them informed of important issues and initiatives, he felt that the time spent in district meetings compromised his ability to conduct observations: “I haven't had a day when I've been left alone by everybody for a long time” (Principal, Session 3).

Some feedback on this sub-theme was positive. One teacher described in detail the constructive changes that occurred in her classroom over the course of the year as a result of Mr. Billup's focus on quality instruction:

And you have to be able to sit down and explain that data . . . I changed the entire way I was teaching English this year . . . and literally went from 12% to 54% passing in my [special education] class. . . . Having the remediation has definitely impacted the way I go about [teaching]. (Teacher 6, Session 1)

The principal explained:

I think the good teachers appreciate these changes. I think the teachers who are struggling—it makes it harder for them. They were always allowed to do what they wanted to do. Now they're being scrutinized. (Principal, Session 3)

Thus, the principal indicated that he had identified good versus poor-performing teachers without conducting a large number of classroom observations, and stated that his priority was to address those individuals with performance deficits. Conversely, most participants equated Mr. Billups' lack of active participation in the teaching and learning process through observations with a lack of knowledge regarding how the majority of teachers at Countryville Middle School performed. This lack of feedback created tension and stress for teachers who felt that they did not know how Mr. Billups perceived their performance.

Quality of staff. In discussing Mr. Billups' leadership focus on quality instruction, five non-teacher comments and one teacher comment addressed the challenges that Mr. Billups faced with a number of staff members who were not performing to expectations. Mr. Billups' supervisor noted that this was not a new concern at Countryville Middle School, and that Mr. Billups had competently addressed staff deficiencies in a number of instances. He also noted that overall teacher quality was improving, attributing this to the

poor economy, which resulted in more qualified candidates with an interest in teaching in Countryville.

Of teacher quality issues, Mr. Billups said, “When you don’t have the right personnel doing something, the bottom line is you’re a prisoner” (Principal, Session 3). Mr. Billups discussed his challenges in trying to find a qualified Mathematics Specialist to employ full time. He also remarked upon several issues with benchmark testing that he attributed to the deficiencies of the teacher employed in the position of Instructional Technology Resource Specialist, to which a great deal of responsibility was given over the benchmark testing program. Mr. Billups then shared frustration over getting teachers to follow directions, listen, act professionally, and take ownership of their performance and their students’ performance. Finally, Mr. Billups expressed frustration over the lack of office support staff assigned to his school. He noted that he did not have a dedicated secretary because his secretary was also the school’s bookkeeper and was often tied up answering office phones. The lack of support staff was an identified weakness across the district; each elementary school’s staff was reduced at the beginning of the school year and several secondary support positions were threatened due to budgetary issues. Mr. Billups stated that he was accustomed to an increased number of support staff, which in turn increased his overall efficiency (Principal, Session 2).

Core component 4: Culture of learning and professional behavior. The 49 comments made about this theme support four sub-themes: culture of learning, professional behavior—addressing staff, professional behavior—lack by principal, and trust/relationships. Overall, 21 comments were positive in nature, 25 were negative, and 3

were neutral. While the principal's leadership in this area was viewed positively by some due to his clear focus on student learning, Mr. Billups' mannerisms and lack of trust for staff left others to express concerns.

Culture of learning. Teachers pointed to the increased focus on data as a positive influence on the culture of learning in the building. Creating a culture of learning was described by the principal as a “major focal point” (Principal, Session 3), and one that he saw as ongoing. The assistant principal concurred: “The culture has started to change. It’s different just because of the emphasis on higher expectations, and teachers are starting to meet those expectations.” The principal’s supervisor also agreed that the increased focus on learning and instructional time, combined with an attempt to implement more professional development for teachers, were positive steps towards the development of a culture of learning and professional behavior in the school. However, it was noted that Professional Learning Communities (a district-wide initiative) had not been adequately implemented in the school through the course of the year. This was attributed in part to the loss of professional development time due to snow make-up days, and in part to the principal’s directive presentation style, which contrasted with the collaborative framework required for the implementation of Professional Learning Communities

Professional behavior—addressing staff. Mr. Billups received praise for holding teachers to a high standard with regards to professional behavior in their interactions with students. A number of participants noted that teacher transgressions in this area were dealt with swiftly and competently by the principal. One participant even shared, “He has pulled me to counsel me on my professional behavior” (Teacher 3, Session 1). Teacher

participants felt that other, less egregious teacher professional lapses such as tardiness to school and not showing up to complete duty assignments were handled inconsistently or not at all by the principal. Mr. Billups explained that after one year of “giving everybody a shot of rising to the level of professionalism that [I] think they should have,” he intended to place more emphasis on this area the next school year (Principal, Session 2).

Professional behavior—lack displayed by principal. All but one participant shared their concerns about instances during which the principal exhibited a lack of professional behavior and/or displayed mannerisms that they deemed inappropriate. Two teachers cited separate instances during which Mr. Billups spoke loudly and in anger to them both in private and in public settings. The principal was described as “huffy and puffy” (Teacher 4, Session 2), and “red-faced and ready to blow” (Teacher 5, Session 2). Three participants reported that teachers felt undervalued by the principal. Two of these participants said that they had experienced communication that they described as inappropriate by the principal first-hand; another participant had heard about incidents from other staff members: “You can see the posturing at times, especially in the smaller group meetings. He has verbally said, ‘I’m getting mad’ . . . I’m told that the professional behavior is not there” (Teacher 1, Session1). This perceived lack of professionalism negatively impacted participants’ views of Mr. Billups leadership.

Trust/relationships. Participants viewed Mr. Billups’ distrust of teachers as a deterrent to his leadership in the establishment of a culture of professional behavior. One teacher lamented, “If he would just trust—and he doesn’t know us yet to delegate too much . . . You just feel sorry for him—just trust me when I tell you” (Teacher 6, Session

1). Another participant added, “It’s almost like there’s no trust or belief that we are capable of handling a task, or a duty, or something” (Teacher 1, Session 1). One teacher participant did notice an improvement in this sub-theme between her first interview session and her last: “I think now he’s starting to figure out . . . he has really started to see who he can have as his go-to people, and trust them, and rely on them, and be a help” (Teacher 5, Session 2).

Mr. Billups saw trust and relationship-building as an area for growth, but perceived the problem as hinging on his staff’s lack of trust in him; he predicted that time would take care of some of the trust issues. The principal’s supervisor viewed this issue from a more global vantage point. He saw the lack of trust and strong relationships as an issue encompassing the principal, the staff, and some parents. Reflecting upon the entire school year, he said:

I think that trust has not improved overall. I do think there are some pockets, some relationships that have developed, but overall I would say lack of trust. And it goes both ways. . . . I think the biggest thing is he needs to build relationships in his building. That is by far the most important thing. (Supervisor, Session 2)

Core component 5: Connections to external communities. Participants perceived Mr. Billups as having good intentions in his attempts to connect to parents and the community. However, due to the lack of focus and follow-through on initiatives and activities related to this theme, the overall perception of Mr. Billups’ leadership in this area was negative. Of the 25 comments made relating to connections to external communities, 10 were positive and 15 were negative in nature.

Participants noted that Mr. Billups had expressed his strong desire to improve upon and increase communication with parents and community stakeholders through a number of venues. Unfortunately, with the exception of the increased use of Instant Alert (an automated parent calling and messaging system), plans made were not implemented or were implemented inconsistently. For example, Mr. Billups planned to begin authoring the school newsletter, formerly written by PTO members, to improve its quality and content. Interview participants stated that the monthly newsletter was distributed with only limited frequency once Mr. Billups assumed responsibility for generating its content. Although the quality of the newsletters that were created was perceived to be superior to previous years, as a tool for parent communication, the lack of consistent production negatively impacted this initiative.

Core component 6: Performance accountability. Participant comments on the theme of performance accountability focused on two sub-themes: Mr. Billup's ability as a leader to hold teachers accountable for their performance, and the degree to which he held himself accountable for successes and failures at the school throughout the year. Of the 16 comments made about performance accountability, six were positive and 10 were negative in nature.

Holding others accountable. Participants felt that Mr. Billups clearly held teachers accountable for their performance and for their students' success. Mr. Billups said, "I think that is the biggest thing that I have preached" (Principal, Session 2). Mr. Billups commented that one teacher shared with him that in the past teachers had not been held accountable for their performance, and the teacher saw this as a positive

change. He added that accountability would be a priority for the next school year. This perceived focus on teacher accountability for student achievement contrasts with participant concerns regarding the lack of classroom evaluations completed during the course of the school year.

Accountability for self. Several participants stated that Mr. Billups did not always seem to hold himself accountable for the issues that occurred within the school. Some referred to this as “passing the buck,” “somebody else’s fault” or “blaming someone else.” These comments were generally made in reference to specific school challenges such as the benchmark testing administration: “[He is] very big on that—on accountability for teachers. I’m not sure he’s big on accountability for principals—unless it’s good stuff” (Teacher 3, Session 2).

This perceived lack of shared responsibility for student achievement negatively impacted participants’ views of Mr. Billups leadership in this area. Mr. Billups’ attempts to take on so many responsibilities, such as authoring the school newsletter, may have contributed to his struggles to successfully follow through on initiatives. Both major and minor responsibilities seemed to overwhelm him, and it was believed that he struggled to prioritize needs and delegate tasks. Mr. Billups, aware of his weaknesses, noted several times that he was doing the best he could in a leadership position with limited resources.

At this stage, the data contributing to an understanding of Mr. Billup’s learning-centered leadership has been reviewed through the lenses of the core components. The following section reviews data through the lenses of the key processes.

Key process 1: Planning. Twenty-one participant comments were related to the theme of planning; two-thirds of these indicated that planning was a priority for Mr. Billups. Evidence of planning included the formation of committees to facilitate activities such as field day and awards ceremonies as well as planning documents such as the School Improvement Plan that incorporated both short and long term planning. Mr. Billups explained that a great deal of planning had occurred throughout the year, and that additional committees and projects, such as the library committee, would begin in the following school year. Of the great amount of time that he and his assistant principal spent on planning throughout the year, Mr. Billups commented, “We have done *so* much planning this year, maybe there will be a little less planning and more doing—more implementing and monitoring—next year” (Principal, Session 4).

The comments made about planning that expressed concerns were tied to organization, communication, and what participants viewed as pre-determined outcomes in the planning process. Participants said that Mr. Billups’ plans sometimes seemed “jumbled and mixed up” (Teacher 5, Session 1). One participant expressed frustration that, during faculty meetings Mr. Billups sometimes arrived unprepared and without an agenda. Though he was credited for having lots of ideas, Mr. Billups’ inability to communicate these ideas clearly to staff was viewed as a weakness.

One of the new committees that Mr. Billups established, the Leadership Team was frequently referenced. This committee, which met every two weeks, was designed to encourage rotating representation from each teaching team in the school. The purpose of the Leadership Team was to discuss school-wide issues and concerns, and to determine

actions and remedies for problems. One participant, who attended a number of Leadership Team meetings, said that during these meetings Mr. Billups was “running off the cuff.” his lack of preparation, in this participant’s opinion, led to lack of accomplishment at team meetings (Teacher 1, Session 1). It is not known whether this participant’s interactions during Leadership Team meetings occurred at the beginning, middle, or towards the end of the school year. Mr. Billups viewed the Leadership Team as a work in progress. He stated that for the first half of the school year, he had difficulty engaging teachers in conversations about school issues. He noted that during the second half of the year, the Leadership Team was developing into the problem-solving committee that he envisioned.

Finally, although Mr. Billups asserted that he was careful not to ask for opinions unless he truly wanted them, three participants felt that Mr. Billups was not open to suggestions during team meetings unless the suggestions made were ones that Mr. Billups already had in mind. When referring to the types of discussions that occurred at planning meetings, one participant said, “It’s what he wants” (Teacher 1, Session 1).

Key process 2: Implementing. The number of comments made on this theme was second only among all comments in this family to the number of comments made about high standards for student learning. Of the 55 comments made by participants about implementing, seven were positive, 37 were negative, and five were neutral. Overall, participants felt that Mr. Billups’ struggled to implement school initiatives. Responses supporting this claim repeatedly cited the principal’s hesitancy to delegate tasks and the lack of completion of several initiatives.

Mr. Billups' performance as an implementer received praise for some completed initiatives. Participants recognized that Mr. Billups provided the impetus for hiring the mathematics consultant who was widely recognized as a positive force in the school. Mr. Billups was also recognized for initiating the move from a two-load to a one-load bus system in the afternoons; this resulted in increased instructional time and also allowed for adequate supervision of all students during dismissal. As noted earlier, the changes in the master schedule that allowed the school to implement a daily remediation period were praised by the principal's supervisor and also by a number of teachers. Although all participants commented on the difficulties that were encountered during the implementation of benchmark testing, a number of participants gave credit to Mr. Billups for not giving up on benchmark testing and for continuously attempting to problem-solve to make the testing program a success.

Seventeen comments were made about Mr. Billups' practice as a delegator in relation to this theme. Mr. Billups was described as "very hands-on" and as lacking trust in the teaching staff to assume responsibility for tasks; one participant said, "He's taking on more than he can—he wants to do it all. That has actually hurt him" (Teacher 4, Session 1). Two teacher participants did note that Mr. Billups delegated more responsibilities to teachers towards the very end of the school year. It was perceived that this increased willingness to delegate tasks signaled an increase in trust.

Twenty-nine comments were made about the lack of completion of initiatives at Countryville Middle School. Participants said that Mr. Billups on multiple occasions indicated, "I usually don't work like this" (Teacher 4, Session 1). One participant said,

“He talks about doing things to reward good academic behavior but very few of them happen” (Teacher 3, Session 1). Another participant said, “He has list after list after list, and doesn’t check any list off –nothing gets erased and nothing gets checked off” (Teacher 5, Session 2). The aforementioned struggles to complete the monthly newsletter and to complete teacher observations in a timely manner were also noted. Mr. Billups’ performance as an implementer was a point of frustration for the majority of participants, and was perceived to limit his overall success as a leader.

Key process 3: Supporting. The majority of comments made about Mr. Billups’ performance in the area of supporting were positive. Nineteen participants comments were made about this theme, and 11 of these were categorized as positive in nature. Three participants perceived Mr. Billups as supportive of teachers when dealing with parents. Other indicators of support were Mr. Billups’ performance in addressing concerns with the library, allowing the eighth grade teachers to implement a positive behavior system, supporting curricular changes, and sending emails to teachers that contained information that could support them professionally. Mr. Billups explained that he showed support for teachers through gestures such as birthday cards, candy bars, and notes to teachers when benchmark scores came out well.

Although two teachers noted that Mr. Billups’ praised teachers for their performance, this was an area in which a number of participants expressed concerns. Two participants commented on the lack of praise by Mr. Billups for teacher performance. A third participant indicated that although he felt that Mr. Billups was supportive of teachers in general, he did not feel that Mr. Billups consistently communicated this

support to staff, nor did he feel that Mr. Billups openly recognized and celebrated the teacher excellence that was evident in a number of classrooms in the school. Mr. Billups commented that he was aware that a number of teachers did not consider him supportive, and that this would be an area for improvement in the next year.

Key process 4: Advocating. Only eight comments were made that related to advocating; seven of these were positive in nature. Mr. Billups' leadership was viewed positively in terms of this theme by teachers, the assistant principal, and by the principal's supervisor. One teacher participant noted that Mr. Billups advocated for the addition of two teachers in the upcoming year's budget. He was also described as a "verbal advocate for student achievement" by another teacher participant (Teacher 3, Session 1). Mr. Billups said of his own leadership, "I am very much an advocate for my school" (Principal, Session 4). The principal's supervisor and the assistant principal both viewed Mr. Billups as a strong advocate for students: "He is an advocate for students—everything he does is done to provide a better educational experience for his students" (Supervisor, Session 1).

Key process 5: Communicating. Participants provided candid feedback regarding Mr. Billups' methods of communicating with them and with other stakeholders. Of the 20 comments made about this theme, nine were positive in nature and 11 were negative in nature. Participants' views on this theme were strong and varied.

Several teacher participants commented positively about whole-school communication that had been facilitated throughout the year using new communication tools. Mr. Billups implemented a master calendar on which all school activities and

pertinent district-level activities were posted. He issued a weekly bulletin for staff that provided important information on upcoming events for the week. Mr. Billups also made frequent use of the Instant Alert messaging system, which was used to send messages to both staff members and parents on upcoming events and activities. The assistant principal said that Mr. Billups took advantage of faculty meetings, staff development, one-on-one conversations, and committee meetings to “push that vision forward that he has.” Two teacher participants also noted that Mr. Billups frequently sent teachers email messages regarding professional development, recertification and other pertinent professional topics.

Despite positive feedback about the new communication initiatives implemented by Mr. Billups, most teacher participants expressed some degree of concern or frustration about Mr. Billups’ communication methods. Frustration was expressed with Mr. Billups’ lack of attention to conversation and perceived inability to stay on topic:

He bounces. He says, “Well, I’m ADD, so it’s OK for me to bounce all over.”

(Teacher 3, Session 1)

He gives off the air that he’s always busy or always has something else on his mind. So I don’t ever necessarily feel like I get his full attention, like there’s always something else going on in his head . . . when you need something it’s tough. (Teacher 2, Session 1)

In addition to this lack of sustained attention, one teacher commented that Mr. Billups did not recognize positive aspects of the school when he began his tenure at

Countryville Middle School: “He came in bashing from day one. Never talked about the good things. From day one he came in with negativity” (Teacher 5, Session 1).

Key process 6: Monitoring. The 35 participant comments on monitoring related to either the managerial aspects of school or to teaching and learning. While the majority of comments on Mr. Billups’ focus on monitoring managerial aspects of school were negative in nature (seven positive, 13 negative, and two neutral comments), the majority of comments on Mr. Billups’ monitoring with respect to teaching and learning were positive (eight positive, four negative, and one neutral comment).

Monitoring—management. Teachers associated managerial monitoring with visibility. While one teacher participant commented positively about Mr. Billups’ visibility around the school, the consensus among most participants was that Mr. Billups did not spend sufficient time out of his office monitoring the building. Although it was noted that Mr. Billups consistently monitored bus dismissal, participants also found that he rarely monitored the lunchroom, which he had promised to do at the beginning of the year. One teacher summarized: “Most of the time he’s in the office taking care of things and dealing with discipline. He’s not as accessible as we would like him to be. He’s hard to reach” (Teacher 6, Session 1). Another teacher described Mr. Billups as “so involved in the big picture that he misses the daily running of the school” (Teacher 3, Session 1). Mr. Billups shared his difficulty in adjusting to the limited office staff with which he was provided. Of his own monitoring and visibility, Mr. Billups said, “This year I’ve been chained to my office more than I’ve ever been. I am looking to change that” (Principal, Session 4).

Monitoring—teaching and learning. Positive perceptions about Mr. Billups’ monitoring of teaching and learning related to his focus on benchmark testing results and on student achievement data in general. This positive recognition of Mr. Billups’ understanding of strengths and weaknesses in his building was tempered by the lack of observations completed in classrooms noted earlier. The principal’s supervisor explained, “I find that Mr. Billups constantly informally monitors instructions and his teachers’ performance. I do believe Mr. Billups has a very good grasp on his teachers’ capabilities and the quality of instruction in the classroom. I do not often see formal evidence of this monitoring through teacher evaluations” (Supervisor, Session 1).

Although one teacher commented that Mr. Billups had spent time in her room and had constructively questioned some of her teaching practices as they related to student engagement and quality instruction, other participants did not express similar experiences. Two participants said that they had asked Mr. Billups to come to their classrooms to see special activities that they were planning for their students at various times throughout the year; Mr. Billups did not attend these classes. Two participants discussed the absence of positive or negative feedback about their instruction. These teachers supposed that Mr. Billups was focusing on new staff members in his observations instead of observing them. Mr. Billups confirmed this when he expressed his frustration over the lack of progress that he made with observations: “It’s a sheer prioritizing of need. I know I’m way behind . . . so the philosophy that I have had is: let’s focus, even though it’s not a perfect one, right now in the first year, let’s focus on the ones that really need it” (Principal, Session 2). Mr. Billups clearly recognized the need

for increased monitoring of teaching and learning when he said of his plans for the next year, “I will be in classrooms more” (Principal, Session 4).

Non-interview data relevant to research question one. Mr. Billups willingly provided an electronic file consisting of hundreds of documents that pertained to Countryville Middle School and to other schools for which Mr. Billups previously served as principal. An analysis of the documents relevant to this study provided evidence of Mr. Billups’ intent to focus his leadership in several areas identified as themes in this study. Although many of the documents focused on organization and managerial planning, the artifacts summarized below demonstrate a connection between Mr. Billups’ priorities and the themes identified in this family.

PowerPoint presentation on school improvement at Countryville Middle School.

This 44-slide presentation was dated in early May of the 2009—the year in which Mr. Billups became principal of Countryville Middle School (C. Billups, personal communication, June, 2010). It may have been created in anticipation of or as a part of the job interview. The presentation clearly outlined areas of strength and weakness in Countryville Middle School’s SOL scores over time. The plan for improvement articulated in the PowerPoint included “high standards,” “increased communication with parents,” in-depth data analyses to include benchmark testing data, and a list of 12 items that must be monitored to successfully implement the plan (under the heading of “What gets monitored is what gets done (each month).” Also included in the PowerPoint was a plan for weekly communication with new teachers, as well as a slide stressing the importance of communication with teacher teams. A focus on observations (“Get in the

classrooms! Paperwork needs to be done before or after school.”) was included, as well as a reference to an observation checklist. Towards the end of the presentation, a slide read: “A Few Words of Warning. If you can’t monitor it, then don’t implement it!!! Be cautious—don’t bite off more than you can chew. If you do implement something—follow it through and evaluate the effectiveness of it. If it works, keep it. If not, then toss it!”

“Strategies” document. Although Mr. Billups expressed reluctance to discuss his experiences with the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program (VSTSP), a document entitled *Strategies* was one of many included in the electronic file that either originated with or included elements from that program (C. Billups, personal communication, June, 2010). This document referenced educational and business strategies associated with the VSTSP. Educational strategies included using formative (or benchmark) assessments to facilitate data-driven instruction and decision making, involving parents in their children’s education, and establishing a communication plan. Business strategies included creating a plan for implementing strategies and creating a method to monitor the implementation of the plan.

Faculty agendas for January and February, 2010. These agendas contained both managerial and instructional priorities identified by Mr. Billups to discuss with his staff (C. Billups, personal communication, June, 2010). Included on the January agenda was a reminder that all teachers were invited to attend Leadership Team meetings. The last item on both agendas was teacher recognition. Although lack of teacher recognition was identified as a concern by teacher participants and by the principal’s supervisor, the

presence of this item on faculty agendas indicates that teachers were recognized positively to some degree during at least two faculty meetings during the course of the school year.

This concludes the systematic analysis of the data pertaining to Research Question One. To summarize, each of the six VAL-ED core components and the six key processes emerged as a theme for data analysis. Participant comments and other data sources indicate varied perspectives on Mr. Billups' learning-centered leadership. The number of participant comments that were positive versus negative in nature was almost identical (162 positive comments and 166 negative comments). The resultant picture of Mr. Billups' learning-centered leadership was one of contrast and complexity. Strengths were noted in Mr. Billups' leadership with respect to high standards for student learning, rigorous curriculum, planning and supporting. Weaknesses were found in Mr. Billups' attention to quality instruction, culture of learning and professional behavior, communicating and implementing. Mr. Billups articulated self-awareness of his own strengths and weaknesses, and made clear that he planned on addressing a number of identified areas for growth in the future.

Research Question Two: What were the perceived barriers in terms of learning-centered leadership to the school's academic success?

Barriers to the school's academic success as they related to the principal's learning-centered leadership were identified in two ways: (a) interview participants identified barriers in interview sessions, and (b) responses on the VAL-ED survey provided data on barriers to the school's success. VAL-ED survey data included a pre-

and post-test self-evaluation completed by the principal, a survey completed by the principal's supervisor, and also aggregated responses from teachers who completed the survey on the principal's learning-centered leadership.

Participant interview responses identifying barriers. An analysis of participants' responses to interview questions pertaining to Research Question One revealed participants' perceptions of this theme. Data from six of the themes identified in Research Question One served as sub-themes identifying barriers:

- quality instruction,
- monitoring,
- connections to external communities,
- implementing,
- performance accountability, and
- communicating.

These six sub-themes were deemed significant because the majority of participant comments related to each of these areas expressed concerns.

In a number of instances, participants connected sub-themes in their explanation of barriers. The barrier of quality instruction was connected to the barrier of monitoring by participants who identified the lack of classroom observations completed by the principal as a weakness that prevented positive change. In the sub-theme of connections to external communities, participants found that weaknesses in implementing explained the discrepancy between Mr. Billup's good intentions and lack of progress.

Teacher participants identified performance accountability as a barrier for Mr. Billups due to their perception that he did not always hold himself accountable for his own performance, particularly when things went wrong. In the sub-theme of communicating, participants made it clear that they wanted and hoped for oral and written communication from the principal that was consistently clear, concise, timely, easy to follow, professional and stayed on topic. Communications during which the principal displayed anger or frustration, topic-shifted during meetings without facilitating closure on topics of discussion, communicated changes to schedules or programs late or without sufficient detail, and failed to respond to participants' requests or needs were cited as reasons why communication was deemed a barrier to Mr. Billups' learning-centered leadership.

VAL-ED survey responses identifying barriers. In addition to interview data, survey data from VAL-ED provided feedback on barriers to Mr. Billups' learning-centered leadership. The 72-item VAL-ED survey, designed to measure effective school leadership behaviors that influence student learning, provides data on each of the six core components and six key processes of learning-centered leadership identified by Murphy et al. (2007). The VAL-ED survey was completed by Mr. Billups and his fellow principals in Countryville school district as a guide to professional growth and development at the very beginning of the school year. In May of 2010, Mr. Billups and his fellow principals completed an alternate version of VAL-ED. During this spring administration, VAL-ED was made available in addition to all teachers and principals' supervisors throughout the school district. School-specific results were made available to

each principal and also to each principal's supervisor. The survey results did not contribute at any point during the school year to the district's principal evaluation system, and no consideration was given to VAL-ED results in determining principal performance evaluations; the principal profiles of learning-centered leadership provided from VAL-ED were used solely to inform principal professional growth and to guide the district's principal professional development program.

Although the VAL-ED survey window was open for over a week, and all teachers were invited to complete the survey and were also provided logins and directions to access the survey, the participation rate for teacher completion of VAL-ED at Countryville Middle School was 51%. This was the first time that VAL-ED had been used in this district; however, a locally-developed web-based principal perception survey was used in the district two years prior. To set the VAL-ED response rate in context, the teacher participation rate on the locally-developed survey was 48%.

The teachers who completed VAL-ED, as well as the principal and the principal's supervisor, were asked to comment on the same VAL-ED alternate form that the principal used. Positive comments on VAL-ED included ease in accessing and completing the survey, praise for the online format, positive reflections regarding the breadth of information covered in the survey and positive feedback on the amount of time the survey took to complete. Two participants noted that they felt the survey was valid (Principal, Session 4; Teacher 5, Session 2) and one felt it was reliable (Principal, Session 4). Negative comments about the survey included frustration with repetitive and/or similar questions, the need for clarity on some items, and a concern that the survey was

“not valid because you could give the principal credit for things being done by other folks” (Teacher 3, Session 2). Three interview participants expressed a desire to add narrative comments to the survey, which they felt would have allowed them to better express their perceptions of the principal’s learning-centered leadership.

Pre-assessment survey. The pre-assessment survey results included only Mr. Billups’ self-evaluation of his learning-centered leadership. In assessing his leadership, Mr. Billups primarily cited reports from others, school documents and personal observations as evidence. School projects or activities, other sources and no evidence were rarely cited or selected not at all (see Figure 7).

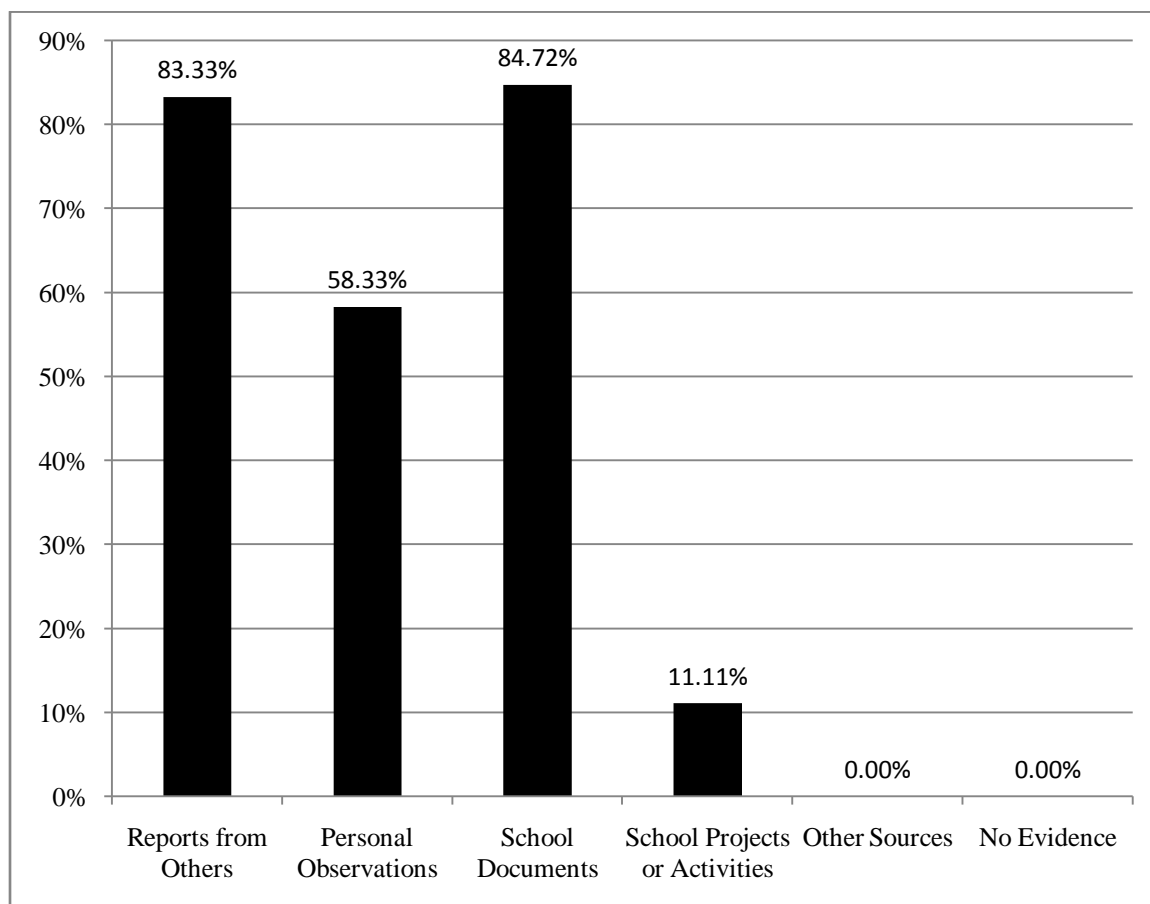


Figure 7. Sources of Evidence Cited by Principal in VAL-ED Pre-assessment Survey. Percentages indicate frequency with which the principal cited each type of evidence listed.

Mr. Billups received an overall effectiveness score of proficient; the indicators for the overall effectiveness score were below basic, basic, proficient and distinguished. The mean score associated with this rating was 3.78, and the percentile rank was 69.3 (SEM = .05). Mr. Billups' rated himself high or satisfactory on the mean effectiveness rating, which reports each of the six core components and six key processes. On the resultant core components/key processes matrix, Mr. Billups scored proficient in 22 areas, basic in seven areas, and below basic in seven areas (a successful profile would indicate the

majority of areas in the proficient to distinguished range). Six of the seven areas receiving a score of below basic were at the intersection of connections to external communities and each of the six key processes (see Table 10).

Table 10

Results Matrix, Fall VAL-ED Survey Administration

Core Components	Key Processes						
		Planning	Implementing	Supporting	Advocating	Communi- cating	Monitoring
	High Standards for Student Learning	Proficient	Basic	Proficient	Proficient	Basic	Proficient
	Rigorous Curriculum	Basic	Proficient	Proficient	Proficient	Proficient	Proficient
	Quality Instruction	Proficient	Basic	Basic	Proficient	Proficient	Proficient
	Culture of Learning and Professional Behavior	Proficient	Proficient	Proficient	Proficient	Proficient	Below Basic
	Connections to External Communities	Below Basic	Below Basic	Below Basic	Below Basic	Below Basic	Below Basic
	Performance Accountability	Proficient	Basic	Proficient	Basic	Proficient	Proficient

Based upon this evidence, connections to external communities, and its relation to all key processes, was identified as a weakness and therefore a potential barrier to Mr. Billup's learning-centered leadership. In addition, the intersection of monitoring and culture of learning and professional behavior was also identified as a barrier.

Spring survey. The spring survey included results from Mr. Billups' spring self-assessment, aggregated results from 31 teachers at Countryville Middle School who completed VAL-ED, and results from Mr. Billups' supervisor's survey. Sources of

evidence used were reported by each participant group; sources varied by group. While the principal used multiple sources of evidence with great frequency (except for no evidence, which he did not select), teachers and the principal's supervisor used each evidence source less frequently, and each of these two groups selected no evidence on a third of their responses (see Figure 8).

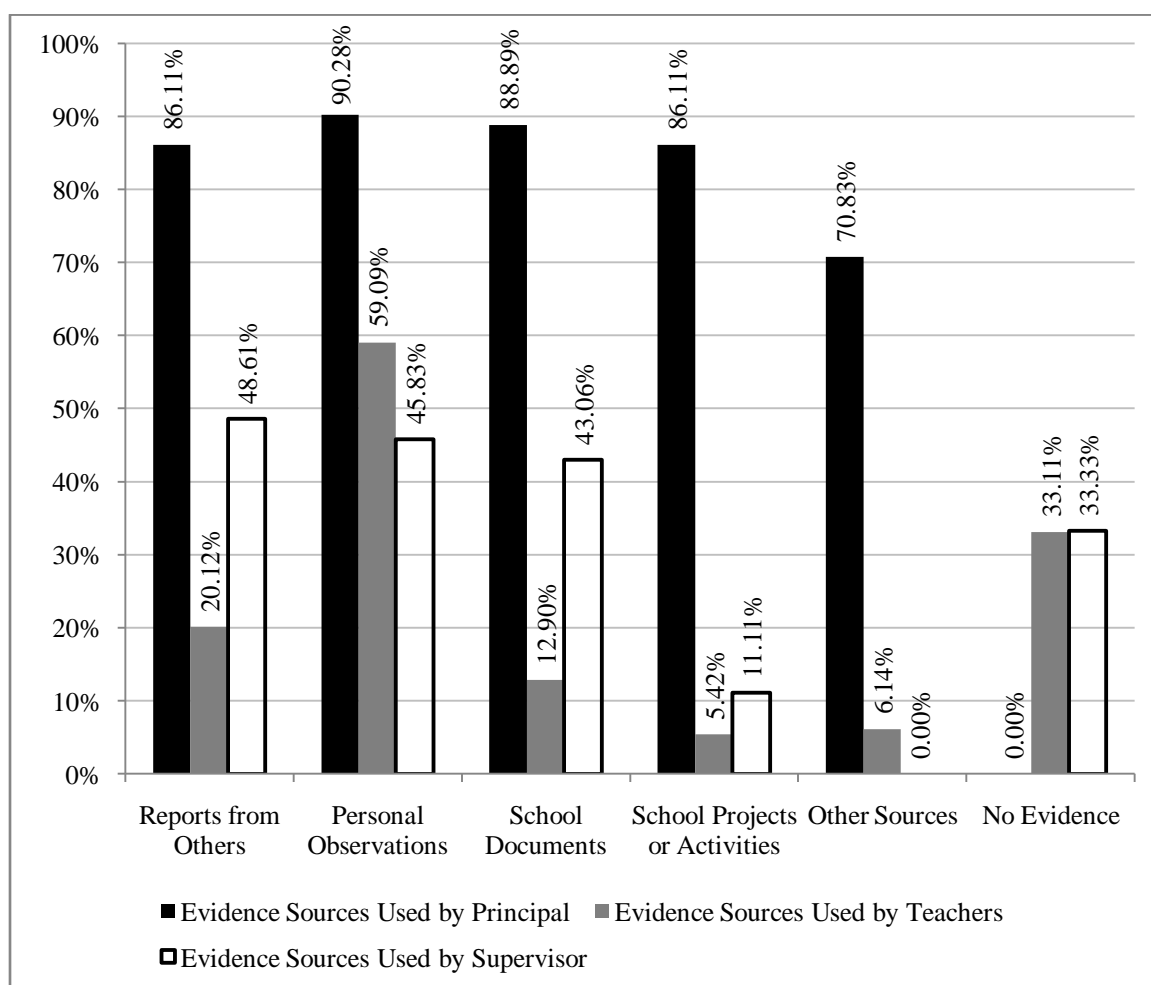


Figure 8. Sources of Evidence Cited by Principal, Teachers and Supervisor in VAL-ED Spring Survey. Percentages indicate frequency with which the survey participants cited each type of evidence listed.

In the spring administration of VAL-ED, each respondent group's aggregated data were weighted equally to determine overall effectiveness ratings. Mr. Billups received an overall effectiveness score of below basic. The mean score associated with this rating was 2.78, and the percentile rank was 1.3 (SEM = .05). On the mean effectiveness rating, Mr. Billups and the supervisor rated Mr. Billups' performance in the satisfactory range for all core components and key processes; the teachers' rating was slightly below satisfactory but above minimal. On the resultant core components/key processes matrix, Mr. Billups scored basic in one area and below basic in all other areas (see Table 11).

Table 11

Results Matrix, Spring VAL-ED Survey Administration

Core Components	Key Processes						
		Planning	Implementing	Supporting	Advocating	Communi- cating	Monitoring
	High Standards for Student Learning	Below Basic	Below Basic	Below Basic	Below Basic	Below Basic	Below Basic
	Rigorous Curriculum	Below Basic	Below Basic	Below Basic	Below Basic	Below Basic	Below Basic
	Quality Instruction	Basic	Below Basic	Below Basic	Below Basic	Below Basic	Below Basic
	Culture of Learning and Professional Behavior	Below Basic	Below Basic	Below Basic	Below Basic	Below Basic	Below Basic
	Connections to External Communities	Below Basic	Below Basic	Below Basic	Below Basic	Below Basic	Below Basic
	Performance Accountability	Below Basic	Below Basic	Below Basic	Below Basic	Below Basic	Below Basic

Based upon this evidence, all areas were identified as weaknesses and potential barriers to the principal's effective learning-centered leadership. The principal's

supervisor expressed surprise that ratings in the satisfactory range on all elements of VAL-ED resulted in an overall effectiveness score of below basic. The principal's supervisor had not anticipated that Mr. Billups' learning-centered leadership would be considered deficient in all areas. During his interviews, the principal's supervisor identified both strengths and areas for growth in Mr. Billups' leadership; he felt that his survey responses depicted this situation. He did not view the across-the-board below basic rating as an accurate measure of the principal's performance.

When asked why he had rated himself lower in almost all areas in the spring survey than he had in the pre-assessment survey, Mr. Billups explained that he was a harsh critic on himself. He noted that he had not yet received an administrative evaluation from the school district, so he was unsure where he stood in terms of meeting the district's expectations. Mr. Billups explained that he conducted a formal or informal self-evaluation after every major school event or process, during which he assessed his performance, with a goal of continuous improvement for the future. Mr. Billups categorized the year overall as a "tough year in terms of learning" (Principal, Session 4). He did not comment further on the VAL-ED feedback.

Of the two sources of data that provided evidence of barriers to the principal's learning-centered leadership—participant interviews and VAL-ED—data from participant interviews presented a more detailed picture than data from VAL-ED. Data from participant interviews revealed six sub-themes, with core components and key processes interacting in two instances. These sub-themes depicted areas for growth in Mr. Billups' learning-centered leadership that were identified as barriers. VAL-ED data did

not contribute to the overall identification of barriers because the data from the spring VAL-ED presented Mr. Billups' learning-centered leadership as weak across the board; these results were refuted by the principals' supervisor.

Research Question Three: What were the principal's leadership behaviors and priorities in preparation for SOL testing?

Teacher comments on Mr. Billups' role in preparing for SOL testing were virtually all positive in nature. Long-term initiatives and short-term preparatory activities were both deemed to contribute to successful preparation for the SOL assessments. Teachers attributed instructional interventions such as benchmark testing, securing the mathematics consultant, and altering the master schedule thereby allowing the incorporation of the daily remediation period as positively contributing to SOL preparation. These year-long initiatives were cited by four teacher participants. The mathematics consultant's work in the school received positive acclaim such that one participant who did not teach mathematics wished for a consultant in her content area.

In the weeks leading up to SOL testing, teachers commented that Mr. Billups was well-organized and that he communicated needed information to them and to the parents. One participant remarked, "[Teachers] knew exactly what they were going to do—kids knew, parents knew. He hit it solid" (Teacher 5, Session 2). Another teacher explained, "There was a packet put together. It did have a lot of good information" (Teacher 3, Session 2). Of his preparation for SOL testing, Mr. Billups stated, "I have a war attack kind of thing for SOL tests" (Principal, Session 3). This included a master checklist for the SOL testing administration which Mr. Billups worked with his assistant principal and

the guidance staff to implement. He explained his intent to add to the list each year as new issues arose in order to prevent them from reoccurring.

One noteworthy change to SOL testing preparation that Mr. Billups initiated was a change in the testing window selected for the SOL administration. In past years, SOL testing had been conducted at Countryville Middle School during mid to late May. Mr. Billups successfully lobbied to change that practice, desiring to test as late in the school year as possible. Instead of closing the testing window right after Memorial Day, 2010, SOL testing did not begin until the day after Memorial Day. The nine to 10 day testing window was shortened to six days. Teachers commented that this change allowed more time for teaching and review, and they seemed to feel that the later testing window contributed to their students' overall success.

The positive comments that Mr. Billups' received about communication, organization, and follow-through of planned initiatives during SOL testing were dissimilar to some comments about his struggles with these indicators in other leadership situations. Mr. Billups was clearly comfortable leading the school through the SOL assessments as was evidenced by his comments about past successes and his war attack strategy. During this time period, Mr. Billups was able to utilize the knowledge of SOL testing that he had gained from the past to lead his school successfully through a potentially stressful SOL testing administration.

Research Question Four: What were the principal's leadership behaviors and priorities during SOL testing?

Participants, including the principal and the principal's supervisor, answered this question by generally indicating that the SOL testing administration went well. It was stated that Mr. Billups was accessible during SOL testing, and that he monitored the administration of the assessments adequately. However, discussions about this question invariably led to discussions about the results of the SOL tests, and an overall discussion on student achievement at Countryville Middle School as measured by these results. The success of the SOL testing administration was tied closely in the minds of the participants to the SOL test results.

Final interview sessions were conducted at the end of the school year, after preliminary SOL results were received. Although it was not known at the time that final interviews were conducted whether or not Countryville Middle School had met AYP requirements, the results did show that student achievement as measured by SOL assessments had risen in several areas (see Table 12). Participants commented positively on the score increases, with most declaring the year an academic success. Mr. Billups remarked, "We've made great strides . . . Any year where everybody stays the same or goes up has got to be a success" (Principal, Session 4). Responding to the mathematics scores, a teacher participant concurred, "I think it was strong, I think it was positive. Obviously it went up in every grade" (Teacher 5, Session 2).

Table 12

Countryville Middle School SOL Results, Spring 2010

Grade and Subject	% Passing 2010	% Passing 2009	% Difference
Grade 6 Mathematics	73	64	+9
Grade 6 Reading	86	80	+6
Grade 6 History	82	74	+8
Grade 7 Mathematics	64	55	+9
Grade 7 Reading	81	82	-1
Grade 7 History	89	Not Available	Not Available
Grade 8 Mathematics	85	81	+4
Grade 8 Reading	84	88	-4
Grade 8 Science	93	94	-1
Grade 8 Writing	93	95	-2

Note. 2009 data is not available for Grade 7 History due to a district-wide curricular realignment that resulted in this assessment being administered for the first time in Grade 7 in 2010.

The achievement data presented in Table 12 indicated the greatest gains in student proficiency on the Grade 6 and 7 Mathematics assessments, with a nine point gain in each grade; in Grade 8, there was a four point gain in mathematics. While all scores in Grade 6 rose, in Grade 7 Reading, Grade 8 Reading and Grade 8 Writing, scores fell by 1-4 percentage points. The drop in scores in Reading led one teacher to conclude that the year was not successful. This participant also commented that she would have expected higher scores with the increased focus on benchmark testing. A second participant categorized the year as not successful academically due to more failures in his class than in past years. The principal's supervisor summarized:

I think, I would say if I had to choose one or the other, I would say not successful.

. . . Let me say that I had higher hopes. I thought we would make gains, and I

probably thought we would make higher gains in terms of our SOL scores than we did. So while we showed some improvement, I thought it would be more. I do think math specifically, I would have to say was a success for the school, but overall I can't say that it was. (Supervisor, Session 2)

While gains were celebrated, more had been hoped for in the eyes of some participants, particularly with respect to the mixed results in Grade 8.

Findings - Change

Throughout the course of the interviews, participant comments about change led to its designation as the second family in the study. In response to numerous interview questions, participants commented on areas that changed through the course of the year, and on how these changes were perceived by the Countryville Middle School staff. Of the 67 comments made about change, 21 were positive in nature, 34 were negative in nature, and 12 were neutral. In decreasing order of frequency, comments about change were categorized into the following themes: resistance to change, change in culture/low morale, discipline—change in philosophy, new principal and assistant principal, replacing a legacy/legend, change in power structure and change in perception from session 1 to session 2.

Resistance to Change

Most of the teacher participants revealed in their interviews that they struggled with intentional and unintentional changes initiated by the new principal. Of the 21 comments made about resistance to change, two were positive in nature, 18 were

negative, and one was neutral. The three sub-themes that emerged in this theme were major changes, minor changes and resistance to change.

Major changes. Despite the fact that Countryville Middle School was categorized as a low-performing school and a school in need of improvement under NCLB, two participants expressed their feeling that Countryville Middle School was a successful school under the leadership of the previous principal, and that continuous progress had been made prior to Mr. Billups' arrival. These participants were unreceptive to the changes that Mr. Billups made, and felt that continuing with the status quo would have ultimately led to academic success:

We're trying and we're getting there and I think we're making gains and over the years we *have* made gains, and I think we have improved and we've gotten better in those areas. . . . [Mr. Billups] blames the past . . . and I think over time we've made some huge gains, you know, with *nothing*." (Teacher 5, Session 1)

There's times when a principal has to get sent in to fix a staff, but when you come into a school that has steadily had better SOL scores and, you know, is getting better constantly, you can't come in and, you know, start saying, "Well, this is all screwed up" to people who know how screwed up it was. (Teacher 3, Session 1)

Of the degree of change expected by the principal, the assistant principal asserted: "This whole year has just been about change." The assistant principal also explained that the decision to make many changes in the first year was a conscious decision made by the administration because all changes initiated were perceived as immediately necessary to benefit the students. The speed and extent of changes were negatively perceived by one

teacher participant who acknowledged the need for some change, but not for so many changes at once:

We weren't so much resistant to change, because we were all for a new principal, and we knew [the previous principal] had to leave. And we were all willing, but I think he wanted to change everything way too fast. . . . I think he wanted to change everything at one time, and you can't do that, you have to—he took on more than he could chew, that's what I'm trying to say. (Teacher 4, Session 2)

Specific changes that were negatively commented upon by teacher participants included the increased frequency of and focus on benchmark testing and the use of a purchased test bank for benchmark testing items to replace teacher-authored items.

Mr. Billups shared his awareness of resistance to some of the changes that he initiated. With respect to the remediation period, he indicated that not all teachers were planning for and using this period to address the needs of struggling students with quality instruction every day. Mr. Billups felt that he needed to add a monitoring element to the remediation block to ensure that remediation was being provided with fidelity (Principal, Sessions 2 and 3).

Minor changes. Four participants commented negatively about minor changes to procedures made by the principal. Though not directly impacting achievement, these teachers felt that the minor changes negatively impacted the overall impression that the staff had of Mr. Billups' leadership. Three participants noted that the previous principal arrived at school an hour before the teachers were required to report. During this time, he made coffee for the staff and his door was open to answer questions or discuss any

concerns that staff members brought to his attention. Mr. Billups did not arrive at school early, and this was perceived as a lack of commitment to the school.

A second change commented upon by two teachers was the distribution of paychecks. The previous principal delivered each employee's paycheck by hand, and thanked employees for their work and dedication to Countryville Middle School as he distributed paychecks. Under Mr. Billups' administration, paychecks were placed in teacher mailboxes. Again, this minor and probably unintentional change was viewed as a lack of caring for and respect for the staff.

Finally, Mr. Billups expected teachers to submit their syllabi to him for approval before sending them home with students. In some cases, he required multiple revisions before syllabi were approved for distribution. One teacher felt that this change was indicative of "wanting to change things for the sake of change" (Teacher 4, Session 1)—in this participant's opinion, an unnecessary change that required time and attention to an insignificant detail.

Degree of resistance. Opinions differed regarding the degree of resistance met by the principal as he initiated changes at Countryville Middle School. Mr. Billups was not overly concerned with staff resistance, which he described as "subtle resistance to changes, mmm, foot-dragging" (Principal, Session 4). One teacher explained that although she had not directly observed resistance to change, she was aware that some teachers had been "blatantly disrespectful" to the principal (Teacher 1, Session 2). She also commented that there were teachers who were willing to accept change "because everybody deserves a chance to succeed in their position" (Teacher 1, Session 1).

The principal's supervisor perceived a decline in the staffs' degree of resistance to change to Mr. Billups' initiatives as the year progressed, commenting that he noted less resistance in the second semester than in the first. The principal's supervisor noted that the previous principal had allowed teachers a great degree of freedom, without providing much direction. Due to this past practice, resistance to change and direction was expected. Better communication and follow-through, the principal's supervisor posited, may have paved the way for greater acceptance of and less resistance to the changes that Mr. Billups advocated.

Change in Culture/Low Morale

All participants except one commented on the change in culture and resultant low morale of the school. Comments on the change in culture described the change from a collegial, family-like atmosphere in the school to a more isolated, less personal culture. These comments were directly linked to comments about low morale. For the most part, teacher comments on this topic were emotionally charged as they compared the current conditions to those remembered under the previous principal's leadership:

The morale has gone from high to low. A lot of people don't want to come to work . . . we don't have the sense of community like we used to. . . . We stay in our rooms because the sense of community is gone. (Teacher 4, Session 1)

It has been a beautiful place, and it's been so happy, and now you don't even want to come to work . . . We're used to being a family. And there is zero—there is nothing to make it a total unit. There is no unison at all. (Teacher 5, Session 1)

The assistant principal noted that staff morale was low when he and the principal came to Countryville Middle School, a condition that he attributed to the economy, the lack of raises, and a reduction in funds for supplies. Although he had observed an increase in interaction and conversation among faculty members, the principal's supervisor also recognized low morale as a concern. While he viewed teachers as desirous of change at the beginning of the school year, he felt that the excitement and anticipation of a fresh start had faded "more so than usual" as the year progressed.

Mr. Billups acknowledged low morale, but did not see this as a pressing concern. He explained his attempt to positively change the school culture by impressing upon the teachers the importance of professionalism. He also indicated that he felt he needed to "keep pounding the fact that we're here for the kids" (Principal, Session 3). Although he was aware that anxiety and stress were visible among staff members, Mr. Billups felt that these conditions would diminish when student achievement increased as a result of instructional changes.

Discipline—Change in Philosophy

Fourteen comments were made about the change in philosophy and procedures when dealing with student discipline under Mr. Billup's leadership. Ten of these comments were positive and 4 were negative in nature. When Mr. Billups became principal of Countryville Middle School, he changed the discipline procedures at the school in two ways: he made modifications to procedures associated with In School Suspension (ISS) and he ended the "points system."

Under the previous principal, ISS was used frequently to address issues with classroom behaviors. Students were assigned to ISS either as a result of a referral to the principal or assistant principal that led to ISS as a disciplinary action, or, more commonly, teachers were permitted to send students to ISS from their classrooms without first referring them to the administration. Perhaps due to this degree of teacher autonomy over ISS, the ISS room was frequently crowded with students who had misbehaved in minor ways—ISS was described as a “dumping ground” for noncompliant students. Under Mr. Billups’ leadership, teachers were expected to go through a number of steps prior to referring students to the office for discipline, and teachers were no longer permitted to send students to ISS on their own. This change was perceived negatively by a number of teacher participants.

Four of the 6 teacher participants commented negatively about the changes made related to ISS. The most negative comment was made by one participant who stated with some frustration, “[He feels] classrooms should be a place where kids want to come: inviting, student-centered—students should love their teacher and love coming to school. You know, let’s make kids happy about learning” (Teacher 3, Session 1). This participant felt that Mr. Billups’ philosophy was counter to promoting rigor in school, and counter to maintaining high expectations for students. Another teacher stated that although she understood there should be “a process to go through with [ISS],” she wished she could still send students to ISS on her own “if it’s one of those days, if they need a break or you need a break from them” (Teacher 2, Session 1). A third participant felt that Mr. Billups’ approach to discipline left “a sour taste in the kids’ mouths” because the teacher was

expected to assume the dual role of educator and disciplinarian (Teacher 6, Session 2).

This participant felt that students would be more receptive to learning if the principal handled discipline instead of the teachers.

Mr. Billups felt that teacher responses to his philosophy of discipline were indicative of teachers' resistance to taking responsibility for discipline and resistance to calling parents to make them aware of problems (Principal, Session 4). He and two teacher participants explained that he referred students back to their teachers on numerous occasions throughout the year, indicating that the teachers had not completed the expected steps prior to referring students to the office. The assistant principal also explained: "This change to being accountable for discipline and classroom management had been difficult for a number of teachers." Mr. Billups commented that work in this area would continue in the coming school year. Mr. Billups' supervisor praised Mr. Billups for his close monitoring of student discipline, and for his responsiveness to significant situations that arose throughout the course of the school year (Supervisor, Session 1).

The other change to discipline procedures made by Mr. Billups was the discontinuation of a demerit or "points system" that had been used school-wide for several years. Under this system, teachers assigned students points for various discipline infractions. If a student reached an established points threshold during a set period of time, that student would lose privileges such as attendance at dances or special assemblies. The points system was viewed negatively by some parents, teachers, and central office administrators, and Mr. Billups discontinued the point system prior to the

beginning of the 2009-10 school year. Though no one seemed to miss this system, and though negative complaints about it were prevalent when it existed, only one participant, the assistant principal, commented about its demise throughout the course of interview conducted.

New Principal and Assistant Principal

The five participant comments made about the impact that having a new principal and assistant principal in the same school year were all neutral in nature. Though these comments acknowledged the newness of both administrators as challenging, they did not indicate that these challenges negatively impacted Mr. Billups' leadership. Mr. Billups, though not at all negative about the transition into his principalship with an assistant principal who was also new to the building, remarked about the challenges that this transition created, in particular commenting that he and his assistant principal found themselves "constantly having to learn" and "spending so much time reacting to the firsts of everything" (Principal, Session 2).

Replacing a Legacy/Legend

With varying degrees of emotionality, four teachers identified the challenge that Mr. Billups faced of replacing a principal that served at Countryville Middle School for several decades. One teacher explained that the previous principal was the only principal who many teachers in the school had ever worked for, and also said that many parents knew the previous principal as *their* middle school principal when they were students. Other teachers viewed the previous principal as iconic: one described Mr. Billups' challenge as "walking into a legacy that he can't step up to" (Teacher 5, Session 1), while

another referred to the challenge of “coming in behind a legend” (Teacher 6, Session 1). Mr. Billups recognized the challenge of his succession, describing the role of replacing a principal who had led a school for so many years as a “daunting task.” Although the participants did not make a connection between resistance to change and the lack of change in leadership that had occurred in the school over the past three decades, they did acknowledge that both were challenges.

Change in Power Structure

When Mr. Billups established the Leadership Team, teachers who had previously served as the former principal’s key advisors and, in some cases, decision-makers, expressed displeasure about this change. Three participants surmised that the change that Mr. Billups implemented in the informal power structure at Countryville Middle School was significant. The assistant principal explained:

There were teachers that had power in this building. And I think we’ve taken that away. Because it needed to be, because there needs to be more equity across people’s opinions and views, and I think that we had some outspoken teachers that could almost bully their perspective, their opinion, their way. And we’ve stifled that some if not completely because of the way the power has been divided up.

Explaining the impact of the change in power structure on teachers, one participant, who was not in the previous principal’s inner circle, said, “A lot of people don’t like him. Especially the ones [the previous principal] went to constantly. And Mr. Billups doesn’t

go to anybody constantly. If he does, I don't know who it is yet. But, that's a blow"
(Teacher 6, Session 1).

Change in Perception from Session 1 to Session 2

In the time period between session 1 teacher interviews and session 2 teacher interviews, two participants noticed a positive change in Mr. Billups' demeanor. While one teacher observed that Mr. Billups had been more visible in previous weeks (Teacher 4, Session 2), another described an overall positive change: "It's getting better from when we talked before . . . Honestly, there has been some change . . . now I can talk to him, I can laugh at him. He laughs back. There was none of that before" (Teacher 5, Session 2).

Post-Script: Countryville Middle School's 2010-2011 AYP and Accreditation

Ratings

AYP ratings for the 2010-11 school year (based upon SOL assessment results from 2009-2010) for all schools and districts in the Commonwealth of Virginia were released to the public in August of 2010; accreditation ratings were released in September. Although Countryville Middle School once again failed to make AYP, improvements were evident in several areas. AYP benchmarks were met in English for all students and for all subgroups for the first time in five years. In mathematics, AYP benchmarks were met in all but one subgroup—students with disabilities. In this subgroup, the alternate route to making AYP (the safe harbor provision requiring a 10% reduction in failure rate) was missed by only four-tenths of one percent. Achievement results indicated that Countryville Middle School met all state requirements for accreditation as it has for many years.

Although it is impossible to determine whether or not official AYP and accreditation ratings would have influenced participant responses during the follow-up interview sessions, the data that were available at the time of the interviews did demonstrate student growth in many areas. The final data clearly shows that, under Mr. Billups' leadership, Countryville Middle School improved in both English and mathematics, and in fact came closer to making AYP than in the previous five years.

Summary

The data above depict participant perceptions of Mr. Billups' learning-centered leadership that alternately express praise and concern. In conceptualizing Mr. Billups' learning-centered leadership in preparation for and during the SOL testing administration, participants described Mr. Billups' leadership throughout his first year as principal of Countryville Middle School. Participants' responses candidly revealed a multitude of successes and challenges related to Countryville Middle School. Participants' assessments of Mr. Billups' leadership seemed at times guided by emotionality and reaction to Mr. Billups on a personal level, while at other times reflected objectivity and insight about Mr. Billups' leadership from a professional perspective. Mr. Billups himself demonstrated self-awareness with regards to a number of his present and future challenges, as well as determination to continuously improve his leadership and the quality of education provided at Countryville Middle School. One teacher summarized Mr. Billups' outlook on the future: "Obstacles and problems don't bother him. He's just going to tug along. He knows it's for the best, and they'll be better next year" (Teacher 6, Session 1).

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Re-statement of the Problem

NCLB (NCLB, 2002) mandated a new era of high-stakes testing and increased accountability for schools, districts, and states across the nation. To meet NCLB-required achievement mandates, students must demonstrate proficient achievement on standardized, state-approved assessments regardless of challenges such as poverty, speaking English as a second language, or learning or cognitive disabilities. Although principals spend up to 60% of their day on managerial—as opposed to instructional—tasks, school principals are expected to serve as instructional leaders and are held accountable for student success on federally mandated assessments (Catano & Stronge, 2006; Stronge, 1988).

Research on rural schools indicates that cultural factors, community factors and economic factors present challenges to rural school leaders as they strive to meet NCLB mandates (Horst & Martin, 2007; Lamkin, 2006). Rural school principals face barriers that negatively impact student achievement which include lack of funding, lack of resources, difficulty in recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers, and limited course offerings (Jimmerson; 2005, Jordan & Jordan, 2004; Lee & McIntire, 2000). Although over 20% of the counties in the United States and 60% of the counties in Virginia are classified as rural, research on rural principal leadership in the accountability era is limited (Parker-Rees & Willan, 2006; Salazar, 2007; United States Department of Agriculture, 2007; Virginia Department of Education, 2009d).

Purpose

The purpose of this case study was to examine the leadership practices of an experienced middle school principal, Mr. Charles Billups, in his first year as principal of a low-performing rural school. Leadership practices were analyzed in relation to rural school conditions and challenges, in relation to the VAL-ED conceptual framework of learning-centered leadership, and in relation to literature on change. Although the study was designed with an emphasis on the exploration of Mr. Billups' learning-centered leadership in preparation for and during the SOL testing administration, participants reflected upon and provided their perspectives of Mr. Billups' leadership over the course of his first year as principal in the school. Mr. Billups' actions throughout the first year were viewed as a part of preparation for the administration of the high-stakes SOL assessments.

This study was conducted in and around Countryville Middle School, a middle school located in a rural school district in Virginia. Prior to Mr. Billups' appointment as school principal for the 2009-2010 school year, the outgoing principal had led the school for over thirty years. Poor performance on standardized assessments had resulted in the school's designation as a school in School Improvement—the school had failed to make AYP for five years in a row. During the time period in which the research was conducted, Countryville school district was in the process of implementing VAL-ED as a formative measure to guide principal professional development and growth; neither VAL-ED results nor the learning-centered leadership framework were considered in principal performance evaluations.

Methodology

The questions addressed in this study were:

1. How was the principal viewed as a learning-centered leader in relation to the VAL-ED framework?
2. What were the perceived barriers in terms of learning-centered leadership to the school's academic success?
3. What were the principal's leadership behaviors and priorities in preparation for SOL testing?
4. What were the principal's leadership behaviors and priorities during SOL testing?

A qualitative, case study design was selected to address these questions; the established goals of the study were aligned with the five intellectual goals of qualitative research identified by Maxwell (2005). These goals include: (a) understanding the meaning of events, experiences, situations, and actions; (b) understanding the context within which participants act, and the influence that context has on their actions; and (c) identifying unanticipated influences, and generating grounded theories about them (Maxwell, 2005, p. 22-23).

A total of nine participants were interviewed over the course of the study. Six teachers, each having taught for at least five years in the school, were randomly selected to participate; teachers completed two interview sessions. The assistant principal was interviewed once, and the principal's supervisor was interviewed twice. The principal participated in four interview sessions. An interview guide was used for all interview sessions (Appendix A-D). ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software was used to store

and analyze interview data. Additional sources of data collected and analyzed included the school improvement plan, meeting agendas, training and professional development documents created by the principal, and the researcher's observations and journal.

Findings

This study sought to contribute to the body of knowledge of principal leadership with respect to: (a) research on rural principal leadership, (b) research on principal leadership as it is measured by VAL-ED, and (c) research on principal leadership in low-performing schools. Significant findings in each of the three areas are synthesized below.

Rural Principal Leadership

Of the numerous challenges and benefits associated with rural schooling (Horst & Martin, 2007; Huysman, 2008; Jimmerson, 2005; Jordan & Jordan, 2004; Lee & McIntire, 2000; Pitzel et al., 2007), the data from this study were associated directly with three factors:

- Difficulty hiring and retaining certified, highly qualified teachers,
- Insufficient school funding due to limited local tax bases and sparse populations,
and
- Increased teacher leadership due to lack of formalized leadership positions.

While the first two factors were clearly conceptualized as leadership challenges, the third factor also emerged as a challenge for Mr. Billups as the incoming principal of Countryville Middle School.

Difficulty hiring and retaining certified, highly qualified teachers. Quality of staff was a sub-theme that emerged from interview data under the broader theme of quality instruction. Mr. Billups' supervisor indicated that staff quality was a long-standing issue at Countryville Middle School, one that had improved somewhat due to the poor economy. Despite perceived improvements, the district was unable to recruit a Mathematics Specialist for Countryville Middle School. To try to fill this instructional gap, a mathematics consultant was employed to provide part-time assistance to teachers during the second semester of the school year. Mr. Billups believed a qualified specialist could have made a more significant positive impact on student achievement at his school. This assertion was supported by the school's AYP status at year's end: proficiency was achieved as measured by NCLB in all subgroups except mathematics for students with disabilities. Greater gains may have been made if the district had been able to recruit a Mathematics Specialist to provide services to teachers and students throughout the school year.

Insufficient school funding due to limited local tax bases and sparse populations. Despite the upturn in support of the school district's funding needs by the locality, Countryville continued to struggle with funding issues. As noted above, Countryville was unable to recruit a certified Mathematics Specialist with its budgeted salary offerings. Mr. Billups also explained that he was not accustomed to working with the limited office and guidance staff that he was provided in Countryville (Principal, Session 3). Other school districts in which he had worked were able to fund more office and guidance positions, which contributed to increased efficiency and operations.

Teachers also perceived that they had fewer resources than neighboring urban and suburban districts, which was evidenced by the teacher participant who said, “and I think over time we’ve made some huge gains, you know, with *nothing*” (Teacher 5, Session 1).

Increased teacher leadership due to lack of formalized leadership positions.

The degree of power and autonomy that selected teachers were afforded prior to Mr. Billups’ tenure at Countryville Middle School may have been instituted due to the lack of resource and support personnel. Mr. Billups’ decision to reallocate the power structure such that all teachers were viewed equally and no teachers were given quasi-administrative status met with resistance on some fronts. The pursuit of equalization of teacher power may have contributed to Mr. Billups’ hesitancy to delegate tasks. Lack of resource and support personnel combined with lack of delegation ultimately led to participants’ concerns with Mr. Billups’ implementation of several initiatives.

In summary, Mr. Billups was faced with a number of challenges that have been linked to rural schools. He and other participants displayed awareness of these challenges. The challenge of hiring qualified staff was particularly daunting, and was a barrier that was not resolved during the course of the school year. The absence of one of the key resources needed to improve student achievement—a Mathematics Specialist—may have negatively impacted the school’s AYP status. Lack of support personnel created challenges for Mr. Billups in terms of his efficiency and limited options to delegate tasks.

Principal Leadership as it is Measured by the Learning Centered-Leadership Framework/VAL-ED

The data provided by interview participants supported the Murphy et al. (2007) assertion that the learning-centered leadership framework provided a comprehensive and meaningful way to evaluate principal instructional leadership. Interview participants' responses to questions based upon the six core components and six key processes that formed the basis for VAL-ED (Murphy et al., 2007) revealed Mr. Billups' successes and challenges as a learning-centered leader. The data provided by participants presented an exceptionally rich picture of Mr. Billups' leadership that essentially overshadowed the data gleaned from VAL-ED survey results in complexity and usefulness. The resultant comprehensive picture of Mr. Billups' leadership demonstrated the efficacy of using the learning-centered leadership framework to assess principal leadership.

Findings from interview data. Interview participants identified an abundance of relative strengths and weaknesses in Mr. Billups' performance which were identified by the themes and sub-themes of the VAL-ED/Learning-Centered Leadership family. Successes and areas for growth were noted for each of the core components and key processes of learning-centered leadership conceptualized by Murphy et al. (2006). Areas of concern emerged from participants who expressed that Mr. Billups' lack of trust and hesitancy to delegate tasks impeded relationship-building; however, areas of strength were noted, and the instructional changes initiated by Mr. Billups resulted in increased student achievement as measured by the SOL assessments. A summary of data from each of the core components and key processes follows.

High standards for student learning. Participant comments and Mr. Billups' self-evaluative comments in the core component of high standards for student learning were

aligned with the elements that Murphy et al. (2006) identified as key performance indicators in this area. Mr. Billups asserted that high standards for student learning, which were measured by proficiency on the SOL assessments, were his number one priority. His clear recognition of his strengths and weaknesses in this core component were encouraging signs for future growth in his leadership.

Murphy et al. (2006) found that learning-centered leaders systematically praised and rewarded high-quality teaching and learning. In high-performing schools, rewards were distributed frequently, were provided in many areas, and were a part of the school culture (Murphy et al., 2006). Participants expressed frustration over Mr. Billups' management of awards and rewards; Mr. Billups was also critical of his uneven performance in respect to this element. There was a clear awareness among participants that a school-wide system for rewarding high-quality instruction and resultant student learning was needed.

A well-developed and comprehensive assessment system is one of the hallmarks of a high-performing school (Murphy et al., 2006). Learning-centered leaders ensure that assessments are aligned with curriculum and instruction, and that data gleaned from assessments is used to guide instruction and improvement. Most interview participants found that Mr. Billups strove to implement a well-developed and comprehensive benchmark testing program at Countryville Middle School. The continuous difficulties that plagued all but the final benchmark testing administration of the school year were a clear point of frustration for teachers and administrators alike. However, Mr. Billups was

recognized for his tenacity in continuing to problem-solve and improve the benchmark testing program.

Learning-centered leaders work to acquire and effectively allocate resources in their schools (Murphy et al., 2006). As stated earlier, the inability of the school district to employ a Mathematics Specialist for Countryville Middle was a point of frustration for Mr. Billups. However, in the absence of this full-time position, Mr. Billups was praised for securing the services of a mathematics consultant during the second semester of the school year. Mr. Billups' problem-solving and attention to this need was viewed as evidence of his priority for high standards for student learning.

Rigorous curriculum. Most participants felt that establishing a rigorous curriculum was a priority for Mr. Billups. Murphy et al. (2006) argued that establishing a rigorous curriculum for all students was an indicator of strong leadership that promoted high levels of student achievement. In contrast to this tenet, Mr. Billups commented that his focus was on an adequate curriculum—rigor was a future goal. This sentiment seems to oppose Mr. Billups' clear desire to improve student achievement; however, Mr. Billups explained that he equated an adequate curriculum with thorough coverage of the Virginia Standards of Learning that led to proficiency pass rates that met AYP requirements. He felt that once this goal was attained, increased rigor would be pursued.

Quality instruction. A learning-centered leader is an instructionally-focused leader—a leader whose deep involvement in the instructional program is evidenced by frequent classroom observations and evaluations, and by time spent working with teachers and groups of teachers to address instructional issues (Murphy et al., 2006). Mr.

Billups was recognized by participants for having a strong desire for quality instruction; however, the majority of participants did not feel that his performance supported this aim. Concerns were evidenced by multiple participant comments indicating that Mr. Billups did not spend sufficient time in classrooms monitoring and providing teachers with feedback to improve their instruction. The value of this practice was made clear by one teacher who, having received feedback and guidance from Mr. Billups, changed her instructional practices and saw a significant increase in student success rates on the benchmark assessments. Mr. Billups expressed frustration concerning the fact that non-instructional tasks limited his time in the classroom. The need for an increased focus on quality instruction emerged as a barrier requiring resolution to positively impact student achievement.

Culture of learning and professional behavior. Mr. Billups saw creating a culture of learning as a major and ongoing focal point of his leadership, and he felt that the school culture was changing in a positive way under his leadership. Teacher participants recognized teacher professionalism as important to Mr. Billups—one participant shared that he had been counseled by Mr. Billups to improve his professional behavior. The two elements that negatively impacted participants' perceptions of Mr. Billups' leadership in this area were his perceived lack of trust of staff members and instances during which he demonstrated behaviors that were described as openly angry and unprofessional. These two factors impeded Mr. Billups' ability to establish a culture of learning and professional behavior, which is typified by shared leadership,

collaboration, and collective values and commitment among school staff (Murphy et al., 2006).

Connections to external communities. Due to lack of consistent implementation, connections to external communities emerged as a barrier to Mr. Billups' learning-centered leadership. Murphy et al. (2006) found that learning-centered leaders worked ceaselessly to promote their schools' mission, vision and goals to external communities. Although he was praised for his good intentions, Mr. Billups' attempts to reach out to parents and the community at large through authoring the school newsletter and other methods of communication were inconsistently implemented and therefore deemed only marginally successful.

Performance accountability. Murphy et al. (2006) described accountability using the terms external, internal and mutual. They found that learning-centered leaders worked with their staffs to address both external accountability, which related to goals established by external entities such as those established by NCLB (NCLB, 2002), and internal accountability, which referred to goals and objectives established within individual schools. In working to achieve accountability goals, learning-centered leaders held themselves mutually accountable with teachers for student learning (Murphy et al., 2006).

Interview participants consistently asserted their perception that Mr. Billups held teachers accountable for student learning; this was expressed in relation to both internally and externally established achievement goals. However, participants did not feel that mutual accountability was an area of strength in Mr. Billups' leadership. They expressed concerns that Mr. Billups gladly accepted accountability for gains and positive outcomes,

but at times blamed others for school failures. This perceived lack of personal responsibility for the school's continued challenges emerged as barrier to Mr. Billups' learning-centered leadership. Rather than relinquishing accountability for his performance, Mr. Billups asserted that he was doing the best that he could in what he aptly described as a tough leadership situation.

Planning. Murphy et al. (2006) found that learning-centered leaders devoted significant time to careful instructional planning. This area emerged as an area of strength in Mr. Billups' leadership. Participants cited evidence that planning was a priority for Mr. Billups. This evidence included planning documents, the formation of planning committees for activities and events, and the formation of the Leadership Team. Mr. Billups commented that so much planning had occurred during his first year at Countryville Middle School that he hoped to do less planning and more implementing in the future. This statement once again showed Mr. Billups' self-awareness of his strengths and weaknesses as a leader, and his recognition that he struggled to balance leadership priorities effectively.

Implementing. Murphy et al. (2006) asserted that learning-centered leaders were highly focused on implementing—implementing their schools' missions and visions, implementing instructional initiatives, and implementing assessment systems. Implementing was identified as an area of concern in Mr. Billups' performance; his success in implementing a number of initiatives geared towards academic improvement was overshadowed in teacher participants' perceptions by his unwillingness to delegate and his failure to implement some of the instructional and non-instructional changes that

he initiated. The successfully implemented initiatives for which Mr. Billups did receive praise included changing the master schedule, adding a daily remediation block for students, and moving from a two-load to a one-load bus system.

Supporting. Supporting emerged as an area of strength of Mr. Billups' learning-centered leadership. Murphy et al. (2006) found that learning-centered leaders demonstrated strength in this key process by supporting teachers in their quest for improvement and increased teaching capacity, and also by providing individual support to staff as needed. Participants indicated that Mr. Billups supported them in addressing parent concerns, in addressing concerns with the library, and in supporting them as they worked to fulfill requirements for continued professional certification.

Advocating. Murphy et al. (2006) conceptualized advocating as social advocating, which was connected to leaders' roles as moral agents for the well-being of students. Mr. Billups was described as an advocate for his students within the school system, and as a learning-centered leader who made decisions based upon what would lead to the best educational outcomes for his students. Overall, he was perceived as demonstrating strength in this area.

Communicating. Learning-centered leaders are described as master craftspersons in the area of communication, which includes: (a) the communication and use of data and assessment results to teachers, parents and the community; (b) ensuring that strong communication lines are in place for teachers to communicate with one another; (c) communicating interest in and concern for teacher performance and student achievement; and (d) communicating their schools' missions and visions to a diverse group of

stakeholders (Murphy et al., 2006). Mr. Billups' missteps as he attempted to communicate effectively and consistently with staff and other stakeholders impacted participants' views of his performance in this area. Participants expressed strong and varied viewpoints on Mr. Billups' communications, in part related to the degree to which he communicated clearly and concisely. Strengths identified included the implementation of the master calendar of school activities and events, the weekly bulletin for staff, increased usage of the Instant Alert messaging system for parents and frequent emails sent to teachers regarding professional growth opportunities. Concerns included Mr. Billups' perceived difficulty in remaining focused and on topic, his lack of accessibility, and the critical nature of his communication with teachers regarding past school practices. This key process emerged as a barrier, and an area in need of increased focus, to Mr. Billups' learning-centered leadership.

Monitoring. Murphy et al. (2006) asserted that learning-centered leaders aggressively monitored their schools' instructional programs. Participants commented on Mr. Billups' performance with respect to monitoring in the areas of management and instruction. Mr. Billups was criticized for his lack of visibility monitoring school activities such as the lunchroom. His performance in monitoring teaching and learning through classroom observations was also an area of concern; this was noted in connection to several core components and key processes. In contrast, Mr. Billups was praised for his tenacity in implementing the benchmark assessment system to monitor student achievement.

In summary, the interview participants' evaluation of Mr. Billups' learning-centered leadership using the conceptual framework presented by Murphy et al. (2006) revealed strengths and areas of concern in Mr. Billups practice. Mr. Billups can best be described as a learning-centered leader who, in his first year at Countryville Middle School, possessed some degree of knowledge and understanding of the importance of each of the core components and key processes of learning-centered leadership. Leadership strengths, such as those described in the areas of high standards for student learning, planning, advocating, and supporting, were evidenced by participant feedback. On the other hand, Mr. Billups' attention to the core components and key processes was imbalanced throughout the year. Areas of concern, such as those described in the themes of quality instruction, connections to external communities, implementing, communicating, and monitoring, impacted Mr. Billups' perceived overall effectiveness. Mr. Billups extended his responsibilities and prioritized his work in such a way that certain critical areas appeared to be neglected, to the detriment of the success of several initiatives. His frustrations and feelings of being overwhelmed manifested themselves in visible frustration, lack of attention to detail, and lack of accessibility to teachers. Focused attention to these areas is necessary to promote sustained improvement.

Findings from VAL-ED survey data. VAL-ED survey data from the May 2010 survey administration indicated that Mr. Billups' performance was below basic in all but one area of the 36-block results matrix (see Table 11, p.111). These results were based upon the ratings that teachers, Mr. Billups, and Mr. Billups' supervisor provided for each of the 72 items included in the survey. Mr. Billups overall scores on the Likert scale fell

in the satisfactory range for all core components and key processes. According to the nationally-normed VAL-ED profile, satisfactory scores equate to below basic ratings for learning-centered leaders.

The flat contours that resulted from the VAL-ED survey administration did not provide a picture of relative strengths and weaknesses from which a profile of Mr. Billups' learning-centered leadership could be developed and a resultant path for professional growth and development determined. Mr. Billups' supervisor remarked that he did not feel the overall below basic rating accurately depicted Mr. Billups' leadership; participant interview responses supported the assertion that Mr. Billups demonstrated strengths in a number of areas of learning-centered leadership. The lack of clear, consistent trends in the data could be a factor. In this instance, interview results did not align with the aggregated survey analysis, and the interview results provided a richer and more in-depth picture of Mr. Billups' leadership.

Principal Leadership in a Low-Performing School

Mr. Billups' focus on increasing student achievement at Countryville Middle School centered in large part around meeting the NCLB benchmarks to make AYP (NCLB, 2002). Findings from Research Questions Three and Four revealed the high degree of emphasis placed upon student achievement results on SOL assessments as *the* indicator of school success. Participants responded favorably to achievement gains made on the SOL assessments under Mr. Billups' leadership.

Participant interview responses in the change family demonstrated the significant impact that minor and major changes in processes, philosophy and the power structure

had on teacher morale and on teacher perceptions of Mr. Billups' leadership. These phenomena associated with change are supported in the literature, which explains that change processes must be understood and managed with expertise by school leaders to achieve desired results.

Findings from questions three and four. Mr. Billups' clear priority in his first year at Countryville Middle School was to raise student achievement to the level required to make AYP. This was evidenced by Mr. Billups' and others' perceptions that high standards were a top priority, and by his focus on improvement in mathematics, which was Countryville Middle School's lowest area of academic achievement. Interestingly, only minimal comments were made that provided detailed descriptions of Mr. Billups' leadership behaviors and priorities before and during the SOL assessments. Mr. Billups received praise for preparation and accessibility during this time period, which was a concern noted in other contexts. Invariably, discussions of the SOL process led directly to discussions of the SOL results.

The increases in student proficiency as measured by the SOL assessments led most participants to declare the year an academic success. Gains of 9% on the Grades 6 and 7 Mathematics assessments and a gain of 4% on the Grade 8 Mathematics assessment led the supervisor to say that the year was a success in terms of mathematics improvement. Despite the concerns noted by participants in some of the core components and key processes that comprise the learning-centered leadership framework, the school missed AYP benchmarks by the smallest of margins. The primary importance placed upon making AYP provides credibility to the supposition that if Countryville Middle

School had made AYP (a four-tenths of one percent difference in proficiency for one subgroup), Mr. Billups' leadership would have been viewed more favorably.

Findings on change. Participants' concerns and comments about change were reflective of the literature on this topic. An examination of themes that emerged in the change family shows that, as with the core components and key processes of the learning-centered leadership framework (Murphy et al., 2006), Mr. Billups demonstrated uneven mastery of some elements crucial to the change process. While areas for growth were noted in relation to emotional competence (Newmann et al., 2000), Mr. Billups clearly displayed other key characteristics necessary to initiate and influence change.

Effective change leadership requires a principal leader who possesses the emotional competence to establish lasting connections with teachers and other stakeholders (Newmann et al., 2000). These connections create pathways through which the principal asserts influence that impacts instructional practices and ultimately leads to teacher empowerment (Fairchild et al., 2007; Fullan, 2006). Newmann et al. (2000) described the characteristics of self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills as comprising emotional competence. In these areas, participants expressed concerns with Mr. Billups' performance. Attention to these elements is needed for Mr. Billups to support sustained improvements at Countryville Middle School.

Teachers expressed concerns about the dropping morale and negative changes that they detected in the school's culture. Participants did not indicate that the previous principal's seemingly minor practices that showed caring and kindness (such as making coffee for staff and hand-delivering paychecks) were replaced by new traditions during

which Mr. Billups demonstrated his commitment to the teachers on a personal level. Mr. Billups was also described as difficult to reach (Teacher 2, Session 1), which contributed to teacher unease in this area.

Mr. Billups' lack of direct focus on classroom instructional practice left teachers unsure of his perceptions of their ability. In addition, Mr. Billups' hesitancy to delegate tasks or responsibilities made teachers feel that he distrusted them and viewed them as incompetent. These elements coalesced to make teachers feel unsure of themselves and of their value within the organization. Although two participants perceived a positive change in Mr. Billups' demeanor and level of trust at the end of the school year (Teacher 5, Session 2), this was not echoed by the other participants.

Fairchild et al. (2007) and Kowal et al. (2007) described traits of successful turnaround leaders which included: resilience, resoluteness, courage, problem-solving and decisiveness. Mr. Billups' leadership embodied these traits, which was evidenced by his willingness to address longstanding deficiencies at Countryville Middle School. The three most obvious examples of this were the change in discipline procedures, the benchmark testing system, and the change in power structure.

The swift termination of the points system, combined with changes to the ISS procedures, created an environment in which teachers were expected to responsibly and appropriately work with students who displayed misbehaviors in their classrooms. Teachers were no longer offered the choice of removing students from their classrooms at their own discretion, nor were they allowed to punitively dole out demerits for misbehavior. Instead, teachers were expected to work with their students and their

students' families to address behavior difficulties, and students were to be removed from the learning environment only as a last resort. One participant's pejorative response to Mr. Billups' pro-student philosophy of discipline--"[He feels] classrooms should be a place where kids want to come: inviting, student centered . . . You know, let's make kids happy about learning" (Teacher 3, Session 1)—demonstrated the level of resistance that Mr. Billups faced. There was no indication at any time during the interviews that Mr. Billups considered lowering his expectations for teachers in working with students with discipline issues; he displayed resoluteness and decisiveness with regards to this issue.

A second example of Mr. Billups' tenacity in the face of persistent challenges was his dedication to the benchmark testing system. The combination of technical issues and lack of knowledgeable support staff to overcome these issues may have led other leaders to abandon the benchmark initiative. Mr. Billups maintained his dedication to making the benchmark testing system work, and by doing this, showed teachers how highly he regarded obtaining and utilizing data to improve instruction.

When Mr. Billups assumed the principalship, it would have been easy for him to allow teachers who were comfortable in their roles as quasi-administrators to continue with past practices. This is especially true because both Mr. Billups and his assistant principal were new to the building, and having knowledgeable staff to lean on and to assume responsibilities would have facilitated Mr. Billups' transition. Instead of maintaining the status quo, Mr. Billups provoked disfavor among many teachers by eliminating the power structure that existed and creating equity among teachers. The fact that this made him unpopular, and that his workload was increased as a result of the

change, did not dissuade Mr. Billups from doing what he felt was best for the staff and ultimately for the students.

Recommendations

As education in the accountability era continues to evolve, school leaders will be expected to ensure that all students demonstrate academic achievement at increasing levels of proficiency. Distinguished levels of leadership will be required in order for educational leaders to meet the rigorous demands placed upon them. School leaders will need to balance leadership responsibilities and priorities, while at the same time building staff trust and relationships, to sustain improved educational outcomes for all students.

This study demonstrated that the core components and key processes presented in the learning-centered leadership framework model (Murphy et al., 2006) provide a comprehensive foundation for evaluating principal leadership. This framework should be considered by educational leaders as a foundation for professional assessment, self-assessment and for planning professional growth for building principals.

School leaders must understand change principles to effectively initiate and manage change (Fullan, 2006). Whether planning moderate or systemic change, the success of change initiatives can be linked to the degree to which school leaders understand and attend to the principles of change and reform outlined in the literature. Imbalances in leadership skills can impede the leveraging of leadership to affect and sustain change.

Professional development for school leaders at both the local school district and university levels should focus on both the learning-centered leadership framework and on

change principles. A goal of leadership training should be to help principals develop balanced leadership skills that address both a strong knowledge of teaching and learning and the social and emotional competence that is equally critical to principals' success.

Limitations

The interpretation of these findings are limited by a number of factors. First, the study is limited by the nature of the case study research design. Second, the study is limited by the scope of research conducted. Finally, the researcher's role and biases must be taken into account when interpreting the results of this study.

Inherent in the design of this case study is the examination of a single individual in a specified context over a finite period of time. The description of the setting indicates Mr. Billups' unique background, as well as the context in which Countryville Middle School is situated. Although elements of this research context are representative of many schools and districts across the nation, the results are not immediately generalizable to another setting.

The scope of research was limited to the principals' first year at Countryville Middle School, and specifically to the time period leading up to and immediately following the SOL testing administration. Had this study continued, unanswered questions regarding whether or not the principal made changes to his leadership practices as a result of his self-reflections would have been answerable. Further, if the study had continued, overall perceptions of the principal's leadership after the school did not make AYP by a very narrow margin could have been explored, as well as the principal's use of SOL data.

Finally, the researcher's background should be taken into account when interpreting the results of this study. The researchers' familiarity with the selected school district created both positive and negative situations. The researcher's knowledge of the school district contributed to the description of the setting and the understanding of the problem. However, the researcher's familiarity with the district may have led to either an increased focus or a de-emphasis on issues or developments during the research that a less familiar researcher may have interpreted differently. It is also possible that participants' responses to questions were affected by their familiarity with the researcher.

Implications for Future Research

The extent to which participants were able to describe Mr. Billups' leadership in terms of the core components and key processes (Murphy et al., 2007) indicated the strength of the learning-centered leadership framework upon which VAL-ED was designed. These elements defined Mr. Billups' leadership richly and comprehensively. Participants' identification and descriptions of Mr. Billups' leadership referenced many of the descriptors that support this framework (Murphy et al., 2006).

If the research conducted in this specific context had been limited to the results gathered from the VAL-ED survey administration, the flat contours of Mr. Billups' leadership presented by this single data source would have been incomplete and less meaningful. In this instance, it is questionable whether the profile created from spring 2010 VAL-ED survey data was aligned with participants' perceptions of Mr. Billups' learning-centered leadership; Mr. Billups' supervisor asserted that the survey results did not reflect Mr. Billups' leadership strengths. This assertion, coupled with participant

feedback about VAL-ED indicating survey participants' desire to provide narrative feedback to clarify their selected choice responses on the questionnaire, indicates that survey participants had difficulty expressing their perceptions of Mr. Billups' learning-centered leadership using the survey.

It is important to provide school leaders with feedback that assists them in addressing their areas of weakness and in planning their professional growth; VAL-ED is intended to be used formatively to guide school leaders' professional growth and development. Future research that explores both the learning-centered leadership framework and participants' perceptions of the accuracy and meaningfulness of aggregated VAL-ED survey data is needed. Determining whether or not VAL-ED would be strengthened on a larger scale by adding thick data should also be explored. This research would help to establish the best means with which to provide school leaders feedback on their performance with respect to the core components and key processes.

Conclusion

Leading a school is a complex, challenging, emotionally and physically demanding vocation. Proficiently balancing responsibilities and priorities to affect change and raise the student achievement threshold for all students requires skill and artistry. Distinguished school leaders synthesize broad perspectives that encompass hindsight and foresight, and communicate a vision that provides global perspective without abandoning attention to detail.

The clear light of logical decision-making is often muddled by layers of opposing interests and unforeseen consequences. Technology initiatives intended to facilitate

progress can impede advancement when ineptly supported. A school leader's focus on selected initiatives has the potential to shift the balance of scant resources away from equally important areas of need; endeavors that change too much at once invariably lead to frustration and opposition. Building an organizational foundation based upon relationships that are grounded in respect and trust is paramount to the success of school change and reform.

As principals are increasingly faced with rising expectations for student achievement, understanding the factors that have been found to successfully influence change, and those that diminish leaders' capacities to manage change, becomes imperative. The degree to which principals exhibit the tenets of learning-centered leadership is indicative of their professional expertise. Good intentions and satisfactory performance are not enough; principals must develop strength across many areas to become distinguished educational leaders.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Principal/*Administrator* Initial Interview Questions

These questions were asked during the initial Principal and Administrator interview sessions (Sessions 1-3 of the Principal interviews):

How long have you been an administrator?

Describe your career in education.

Describe Countryville Middle School (CMS).

What is your role at CMS?

What challenges have you/*has the principal* faced at CMS this year?

What actions have you/*has the principal* taken to promote student achievement?

What have you/*has the principal* done to prepare CMS for SOL testing?

What are your/*the principal's* priorities during SOL testing?

Describe your/*the principal's* successes at CMS.

Describe your/*the principal's* continued challenges at CMS.

How has the school changed over the course of this school year?

What is the relationship between you/*the principal* and the faculty?

How do you/*does the principal* communicate expectations with the faculty?

What will you/*does the principal need to* do in the future to increase student achievement at CMS?

Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about your/*the principal's* leadership?

If you could change one thing about CMS, what would it be and why?

Appendix B

Teacher Initial Interview Questions

These questions were asked during the initial Teacher interview sessions:

How long have you been a faculty member at Countryville Middle School (CMS)?

Describe your career in education.

Describe CMS.

What is your primary role at CMS?

What role does the principal play?

What challenges has the principal faced at CMS this year?

What actions has the principal taken to promote student achievement?

What has the principal done to prepare CMS for SOL testing?

What are the principal's priorities during SOL testing?

Describe the principal's successes at CMS.

Describe the principal's continued challenges at CMS.

How has the school changed over the course of this school year?

What is the relationship between you and the principal?

How does the principal communicate expectations with the faculty?

What does the principal need to do in the future to increase student achievement at CMS?

Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about the principal's leadership?

If you could change one thing about CMS, what would it be and why?

Appendix C

Principal/Administrator Follow-Up Questions

These questions were asked during the follow-up Principal and Administrator interview sessions:

The use of the VAL-ED survey as a tool to measure the principal's Learning-Centered Leadership

Describe your experience completing the VAL-ED survey.

Do you feel that the VAL-ED survey addressed the elements of principal leadership that needed to be addressed?

Would you recommend that the district use VAL-ED in the future? Why or why not?

You rated yourself/*The principal rated himself* lower on the VAL-ED in post-data than in pre-data in a number of areas. Can you tell me about this?

SOL Assessments / Student Achievement

How do you feel that the SOL testing window went with respect to the following:

Preparation?

Organization?

Communication?

Here are the preliminary results for spring of 2010 (results were provided):

Based upon your reflections on the school year and the preliminary results above, would you characterize this year as successful in terms of student achievement? Why or why not?

Themes from first set of interviews

The following list contains a number of themes that were noted 10 times or more in previous interviews. Please elaborate on any themes that you find important in the discussion of your/*the principal's* learning-centered leadership:

Delegation

Culture of learning

Philosophy of discipline

Communication

Good intentions

High standards / benchmark testing

Impact of changes on teaching

Teacher quality

Implementation and follow-through

Organization

Monitoring of instruction

Outreach to parents

Accountability for student learning – principal and teacher

Planning

Addressing professional behavior with staff

Resistance to change

Visibility

Appendix D

Teacher Follow-Up Questions

These questions were asked during the follow-up Teacher interview sessions:

The use of the VAL-ED survey as a tool to measure the principal's Learning-Centered Leadership (this question was only answered by participants who also completed the VAL-ED Survey on the principal).

Describe your experience completing the VAL-ED survey.

Do you feel that the VAL-ED survey addressed the elements of principal leadership that needed to be addressed?

Would you recommend that the district use VAL-ED in the future? Why or why not?

SOL Assessments / Student Achievement

How do you feel that the SOL testing window went with respect to the following:

Preparation?

Organization?

Communication?

Here are the preliminary results for spring of 2010 (results were provided):

Based upon your reflections on the school year and the preliminary results above, would you characterize this year as successful in terms of student achievement? Why or why not?

Themes from first set of interviews

The following list contains a number of themes that were noted 10 times or more in previous interviews. Please elaborate on any themes that you find important in the discussion of this principal's learning-centered leadership

Delegation

Culture of learning

Philosophy of discipline

Communication

Good intentions

High standards / benchmark testing

Impact of changes on teaching

Teacher quality

Implementation and follow-through

Organization

Monitoring of instruction

Outreach to parents

Accountability for student learning – principal and teacher

Planning

Addressing professional behavior with staff

Resistance to change

Visibility

VITA

Lynn Sodat was born on June 30, 1971 in Fairfax, Virginia. Along with her siblings Lee and Laura, she was raised by her parents, William and Barbara Fletcher, in Vienna, Virginia; she is a lifelong Virginia resident. She graduated from James Madison High School in 1989. She received her Bachelor of Arts in English with a minor in Elementary Education from James Madison University in 1992. She earned her Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction from George Mason University in 1996. She has served as an educator in rural and urban school districts. She has taught elementary students, been an Assistant Principal, and also served as a school district central office administrator. She currently resides in Hopewell, Virginia with her husband Luther, her children Hilary and Luke, and her dog Peanut.